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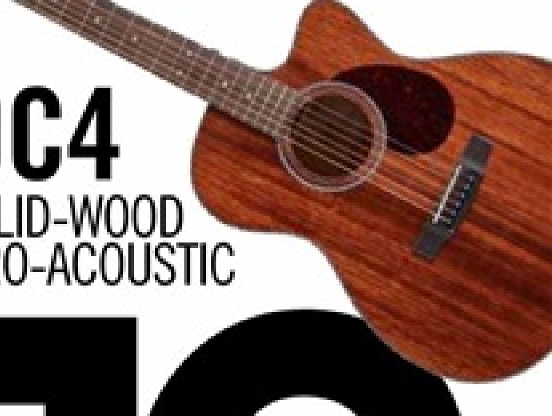

ACOUSTIC

The UK's only dedicated acoustic monthly.

EXCLUSIVE CHAT WITH **RIPTIDE STAR** AHEAD OF **NEW ALBUM**

Vance Joy

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GET INSPIRED with our top variations and chords

10 FINGERSTYLE HACKS
Essential tips from **Mike Dawes**

30 CLASSIC ACOUSTIC ALBUMS
Essential listening throughout the decades

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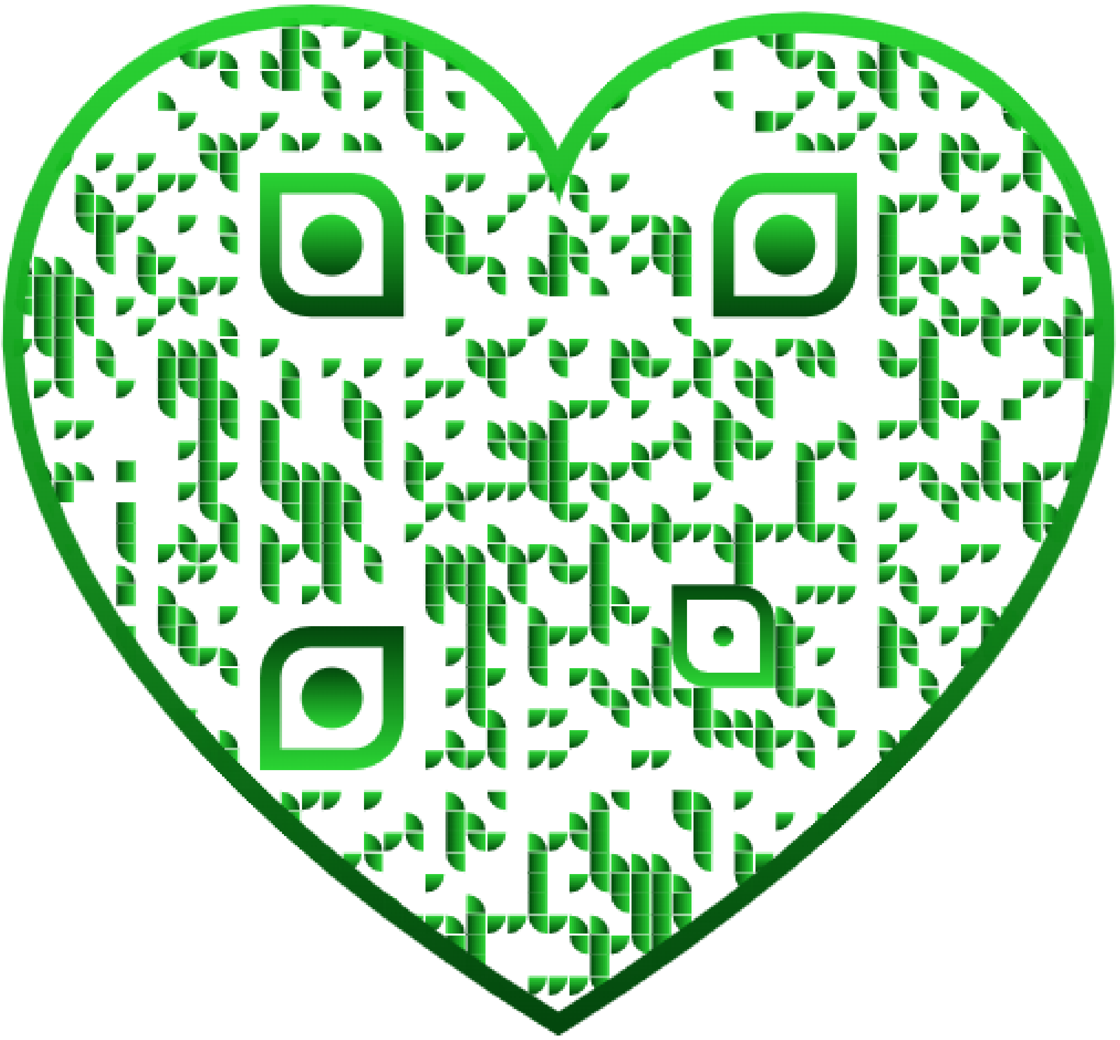
FUTURE



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THE ROOT NOTE

Well, the festivities are over, the Christmas tree is down, and our bank accounts are as dismal as the weather. Oh, yes, we're now on the long drag before Spring. But fear not, this issue boasts plenty to combat those gloomy days.

If you've been meaning to get your head round alternative tunings for a while, then today is the day. We've got a fantastic guide showcasing nine of the top alternate tunings, complete with a few chords to get you started. These are nine tunings every acoustic player should know. Elsewhere, virtuoso Mike Dawes shares his top 10 fingerstyle hacks. There's plenty more great tuition too, so turn these bleak, miserable days into something positive – take your playing to the next level.

In a further effort to combat the bleakness of February, we have a double offering of Australian sunshine in this issue. Up first is Vance Joy. The multi-platinum singer-songwriter, who became a household name with hit single 'Riptide', talks to us about his sophomore album. We also chat with legendary guitarist Tommy Emmanuel, who tells us all about his star-studded new album. Featuring Mark Knopfler, Jason Isbell, Rodney Crowell, Jerry Douglas, Ricky Skaggs, JD Simo and more, Tommy's new one really is a who's who of music. Magnificent.

Elsewhere, we chat to Company of Players, a conglomerate of contemporary folk's hottest names, and speak with the 22-year-old winner of the PRS Fund's Lynsey de Paul prize for emerging female singer-songwriters, Zoe Wren. There's plenty more too!

Gear-wise, we get our hands around the new Guild D-55; a guitar which we reckon never quite gets the recognition it deserves. We find out if rising star in the luthier world, Dale Fairbanks, deserves the reputation that proceeds him with his latest F-40. We road-test the new Epiphone Masterbilt Zenith Century, and see if VOX's latest amp – with Nutube technology – can help gigging acoustic artist take their show on the road.

We've also compiled our top 30 acoustic albums ever, which should give you some food for thought/remind you of records you haven't played for a while. So, until spring, let's stick with six-strings, eh?

Enjoy the issue!

Dan Hobson
Editor

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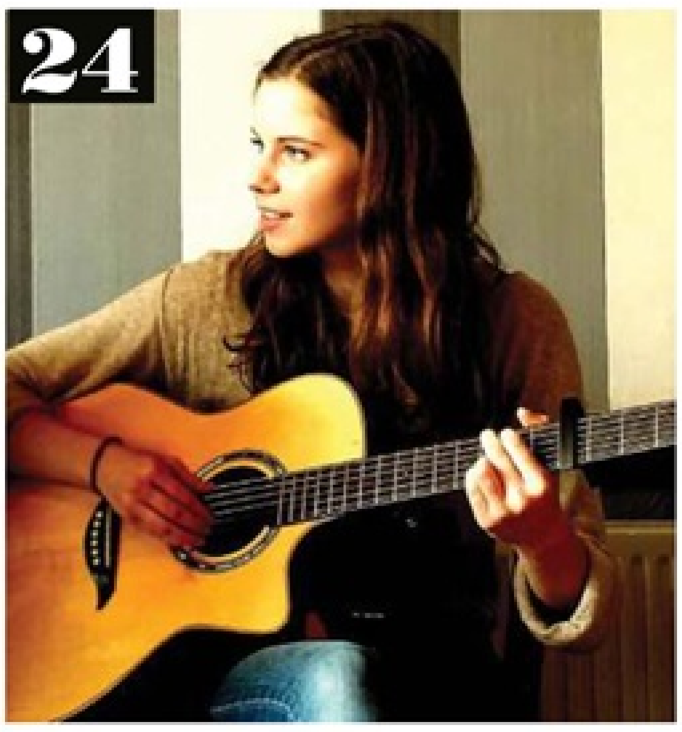

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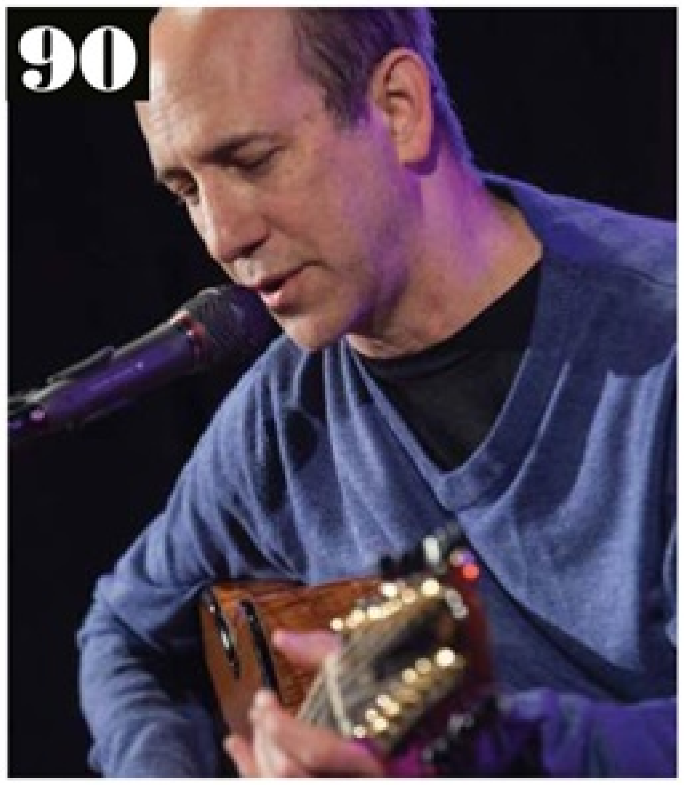

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ACOUSTIC NEWS DESK

FOR THE LATEST NEWS VISIT **WWW.ACOUSTICMAGAZINE.COM**

LEVELLERS GO ALL-ACOUSTIC FOR 30TH

Levellers have announced an all-acoustic album and headline tour for 2018, a year which marks the band's 30th anniversary.

The iconic Brighton folk-punk band will be releasing *We The Collective* on March 9 via their own label, On The Fiddle Recordings.

In a bid to do something a little different with their back catalogue, the band has brought in a string section and enlisted legendary producer John Leckie (Radiohead, Stone Roses) to help develop new acoustic arrangements for eight of their previous singles, including 'Liberty', 'Hope Street' and 'One Way' which they recorded straight to tape at the world-famous Abbey Road Studios. They also recorded two brand new songs 'Shame' and 'Drug Bust McGee'.

Lead singer Mark Chadwick said: "The different musicians, producer and studio combined to make something really special."

Levellers will head out on a full acoustic tour in the spring where they will be playing the new arrangements with guest musicians. Despite the news only just having been announced, the tickets for Preston, Milton Keynes and Winchester have already sold out.

Info: www.levellers.co.uk

TECH FIRM MAKES WORLD'S FIRST 'SMART ACOUSTIC GUITAR'

Acoustic purists, look away now. French tech firm HyVibe has unveiled the world's first Smart Acoustic Guitar, which packs a built-in speaker, multi-effects, recorder and amp into a traditional-looking body. The acoustic features its own algorithms and actuators to transform the guitar's vibrations from the top plate, located by the bridge. Effects – including chorus, reverb and distortion – are then added and output via the body.

Via a Bluetooth connection, the Smart Acoustic can play back music and connect to a mobile app, which also offers the ability to change effect and EQ settings, plus share recordings from the guitar's onboard looper and recorder.

In terms of more conventional acoustic specs, HyVibe's offering features a dreadnought shape with AA solid spruce top, laminate mahogany back and sides and blackwood fretboard.

From $599, available June 2018.

Info: www.indiegogo.com

BE A ONE MAN BAND WITH NEW DEVICE

A new gizmo has been released which can produce an on-the-fly backing band based on your guitar playing, making your axe sound like any instrument by converting guitar signals into MIDI.

OneManBand uses tech to detect signals from the strings and converts them to digital data with no latency. These signals are then sent to the iOS/Android app, where they're processed into different sounds, including piano, violin and drums. The signals captured can also convert your guitar into MIDI for composing with DAWs. Available as an upgrade for existing guitars or as part of OMB's own-brand instruments. OneManBand is currently seeking funding on Kickstarter, with packages from $149/£112.

Info: https://goo.gl/gL3dtt

© Dana Tynan

CATCH JOAN BAEZ LIVE FOR THE LAST TIME

Queen of folk Joan Baez has announced she will be releasing a new album next year – and heading on her final tour.

The legendary singer, songwriter, activist and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee will release a new studio album *Whistle Down The Wind* – through Proper Records, produced by Joe Henry – in March 2018. This will be her first new record since 2008's acclaimed *Day After Tomorrow*.

In conjunction with the release, Baez will begin her extensive 2018 world tour – including UK dates in March and May – on March 2 in Stockholm.

Baez, who last performed in the UK in 2014 when she sold out four nights at London's Royal Festival Hall, said: "While 2018 will be my last year of formal extended touring, I'm looking forward to being on the road with a beautiful new album about which I am truly proud. I welcome the opportunity to share this new music as well as longtime favorites with my audiences around the world."

Info: www.joanbaez.com

C2C COUNTRY TO COUNTRY

FRIDAY 9 - SUNDAY 11 MARCH 2018

COUNTRY TO COUNTRY

Europe's biggest country music festival has unveiled more of its headliners for 2018.

The festival, which is back for its sixth year from March 9-11, promises the biggest stars and emerging talent in the country scene across three venues in London, Glasgow, and Dublin.

Headliners announced for the upcoming shows will include: Faith Hill and Tim McGraw, Kacey Musgraves, Little Big Town, Sugarland, Emmylou Harris, Kip Moore, Kelsea Ballerini, Old Dominion and Margo Price. Plus new US chart-topping artists Luke Combs and Midland.

For the London shows only, Ashley Campbell will present a tribute show to her father, the late Glen Campbell who passed away last year.

Info: http://c2c-countrytocountry.com

HEAR WOODY GUTHRIE TRIBUTE GIGS IN FULL

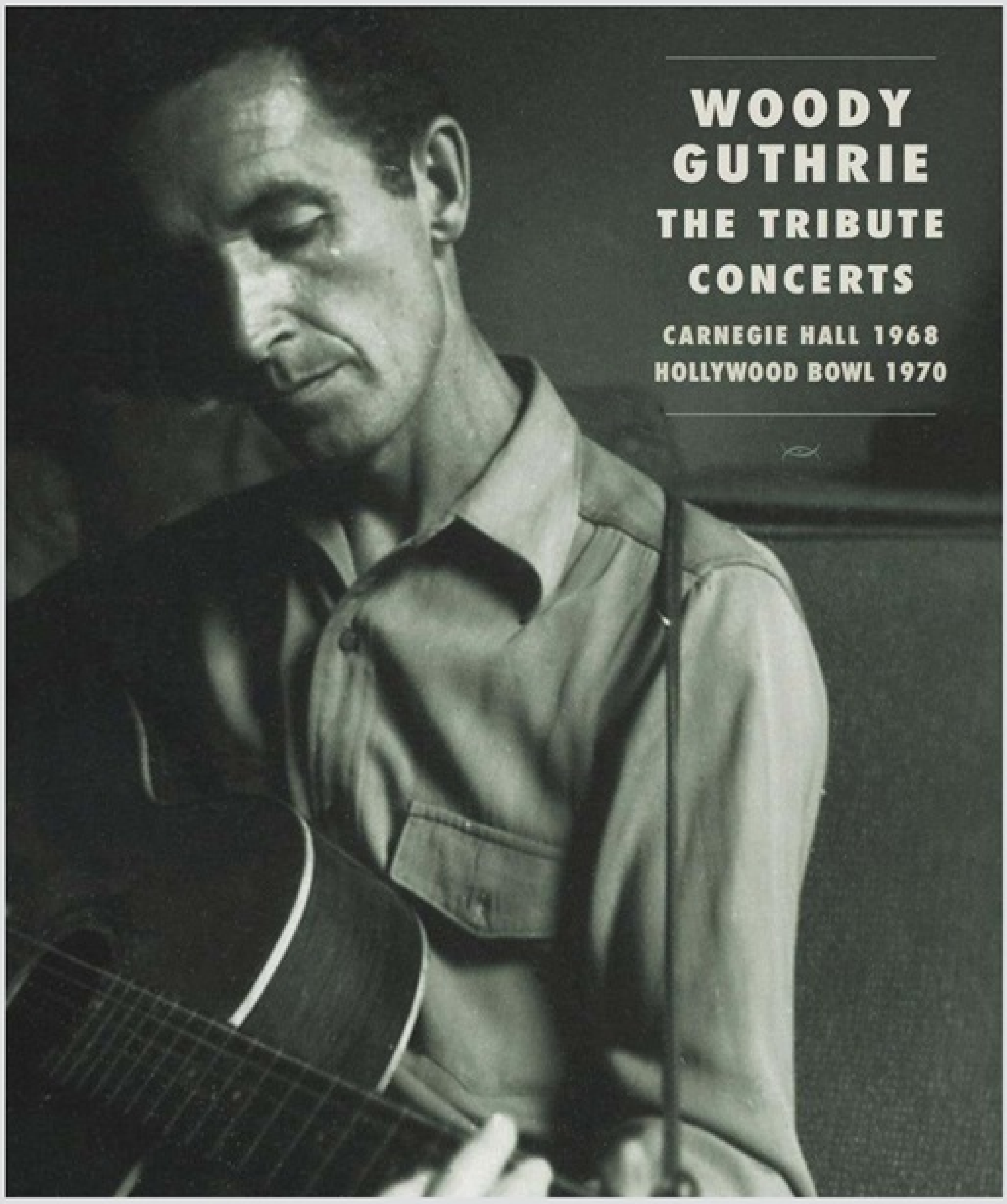
To celebrate 50 years since Woody Guthrie's passing, a CD boxset has been released of the legendary tribute gigs to him at Carnegie Hall and Hollywood Bowl – in full for the first time.

On January 20, 1968, Carnegie Hall hosted an all-star tribute concert to Woody which featured Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, Arlo Guthrie, Richie Havens, Odetta, Tom Paxton, and Pete Seeger, all performing songs written or popularised by Woody.

Then, in September 1970, 'A Musical Tribute to Woody Guthrie', was held at the Hollywood Bowl – in aid of Huntington's Disease, which had killed Woody – featuring Joan Baez, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Arlo Guthrie, Richie Havens, Country Joe McDonald, Odetta, Earl Robinson, and Pete Seeger.

For the first time, 50 years after Guthrie's death in New York City on October 3, 1967, aged 55, Bear Family Productions has released a box set that includes both concerts in full. The package also includes contemporary and historical audio reminiscences; a 160-page hardcover book filled with stories, essays, and memorabilia, plus a hardcover reproduction of Ludlow Music's 80-page 1972 *Woody Guthrie Concert Book*, which contained music and lyrics from 29 of the songs performed at the shows.

The boxset is available on Amazon



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ASK THE EXPERTS

PEOPLE WORKING IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRIES ARE SPEAKING OUT ABOUT SEXISM, SEXUAL HARASSMENT, BULLYING AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Abuse of power occurs in all industries, but in the entertainment business there is the carrot and stick of success and exclusion that makes the imbalance of power especially stark and open to abuse. The MU is gathering information on problems in the music industry ranging from sexism to harassment and abuse. Many working in the industry now feel it is time for a wholesale culture change.

By way of example, the Musician's Union recently received several calls from professional female session musicians who on arrival at a gig were issued with hot-pants to wear. They were also required to mime rather than actually play their instruments. None of this had been mentioned to them prior to the gig. Another female musician told us that after a performance she was asked if her legs could be photographed by the engineer.

> **"We can't afford to lose talent from our industries. Bad experiences can ruin careers"**

Once at a paid gig, musicians can find it difficult to refuse such requests even if they feel deeply uncomfortable. Sadly, women in particular are afraid of being seen as difficult and not receiving further bookings if they do ever complain.

After the Weinstein case hit the press, MU officials held open meetings in London and Manchester to talk about the impact of gender inequality on musicians' day to day working lives and provide a safe space to share stories and receive confidential advice. We will be hosting more across the UK in the coming months.

At the initial meeting, we heard stories ranging from everyday sexism to abuse with long lasting consequences. One musician told us how they turned to Google to work out if they had been sexually assaulted or not. Another told us that she was forced to work with someone who'd assaulted her, even after reporting the incident to her employer.

Another told about his experiences as part of a signed band, with people in positions of power dictating where he lived, who he shared a hotel room with, when he could eat, and when he could use the bathroom (or not). He wasn't given any money to spend so had no freedom and could see no way out of the situation. Several musicians had received unprovoked sexually explicit messages from someone in a position of power and one had been asked for sex in exchange for gigs.

No-one should experience or fear sexism, sexual harassment, abuse, bullying or discrimination at work. The Musician's Union regularly takes on cases for members, and we can offer legal advice and support. Contact us via **theMU.org/contact.**

We are also collecting experiences of sexism, sexual harassment, abuse, bullying and discrimination in the music industry. Share yours – email **safespace@theMU.org.** All information will be treated in the strictest confidence, and no action will be taken on your behalf without your prior consent.

We cannot afford to lose great talent from our industries. Bad experiences can ruin careers and sometimes lives. It's time to act as a community of musicians to end sexism, harassment and abuse in our industry. ■

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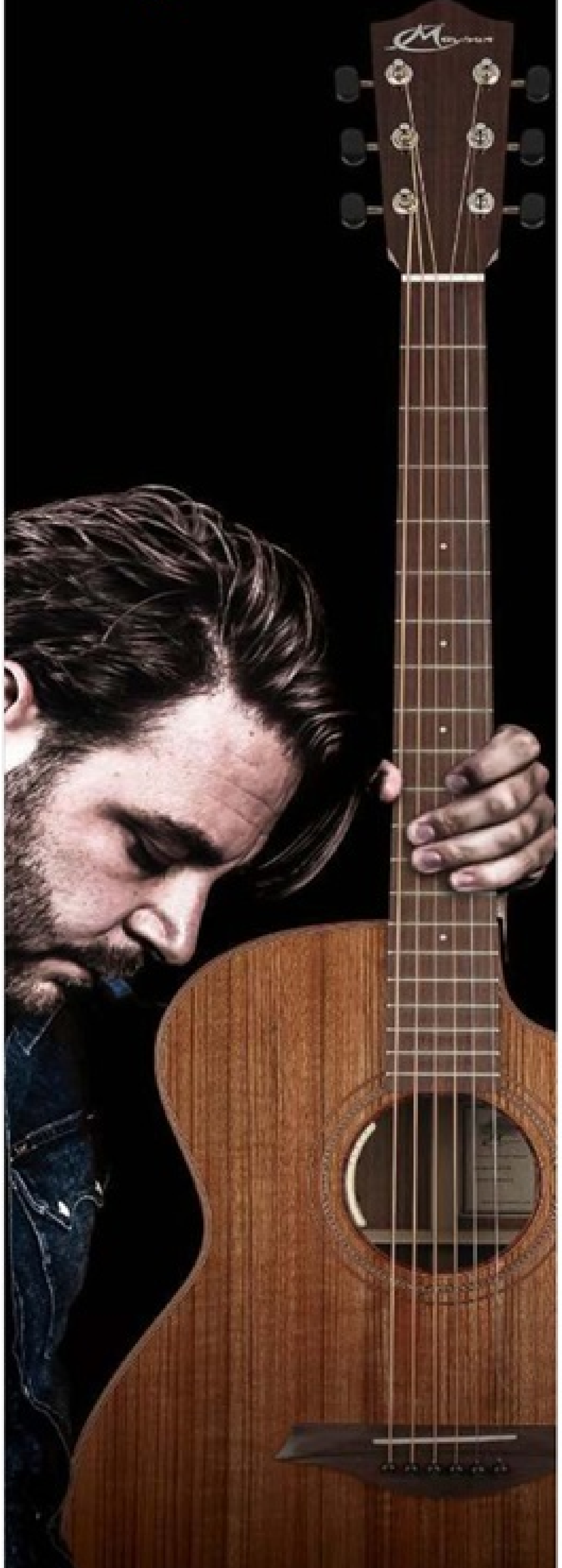

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TOMMY EMMANUEL

Two years in the making, Tommy talks about his new album and why he loves jamming in Nashville

"I'm in North Virginia, it's no man's land, just wide open spaces," Tommy Emmanuel laughs down the phone from his tour bus. "I'm with David Grisman headed for Virginia Beach, one of the last three shows we have to play on this tour."

Sometimes it really does seem that the quietly spoken Australian guitarist is on a never ending tour. He's been living in Nashville for the last 15 years, but the odds are he will have played a town near you recently. And if he hasn't, you can bet he'll be there soon. Tommy Emmanuel's rise to fame has hardly been overnight. Helped by word of mouth recommendation, always eschewing any suggestion of hype, his status as one of the foremost pickers on the planet, has been quietly achieved by pure hard work alone.

"Do I like the road? I don't have much choice, this is what I've always done, I like touring, I like playing for people, you just get used to it," he says.

And now Tommy's new album *Accomplice One*, a collection of stunning duets with a gang of division one players including Mark Knopfler, Jason Isbell, Jerry Douglas and many more, is proof – were it needed – of the esteem in which he's held by his peers.

With 16 performances on the album, each featuring a different guest – or guests – and recorded live, it must, I suggest, have been a mammoth task?

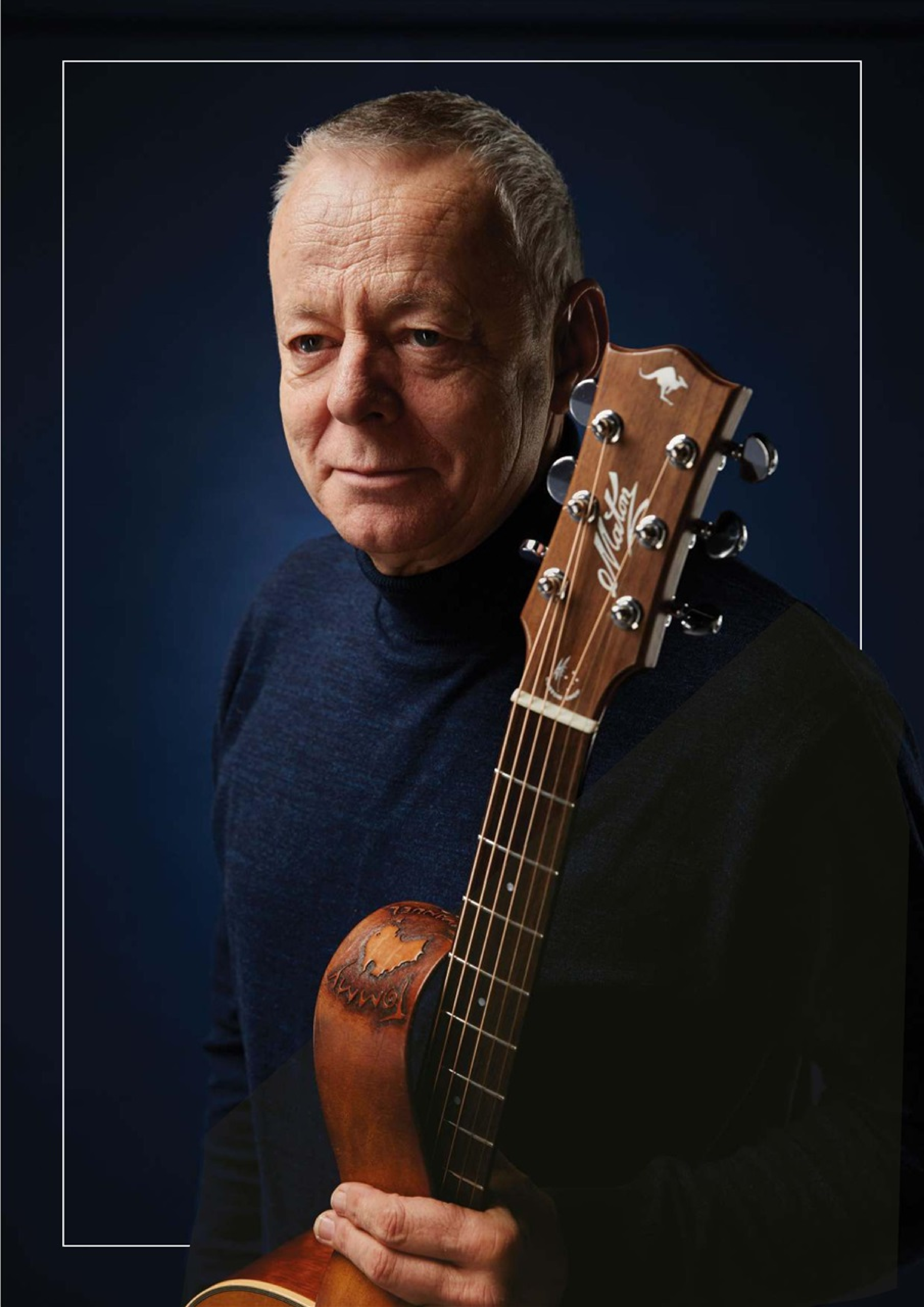
"There was no sending an email to somebody and having them put a part on at their leisure, we were actually together playing in the studio," Tommy began. "It took two years and I had to fit it in between a jammed touring schedule. Of course all the people that played had touring schedules as well, so it's a miracle that it all came together!" he laughs. "The good thing was that all the people were great to work with, we were able to get the recording done quickly, and then they could be on their merry way, leaving me to finish off. But we were all over the place. Some of the tracks were cut in Nashville, the tracks with Frank Vignola and Vinny Raniolo we recorded in Havana, Cuba, and the track with Mark Knopfler was done in his London studio. I originally asked Mark if we could record one of my numbers, but he said he didn't play on other people's songs, it had to be one of his. That was fine by me, because I loved everything he'd ever written.

"When he played me, 'You Don't Want To Get One Of Those', I thought it sounded like a funny Randy Newman song, and completely different from anything else I'd been recording… I suggested I should try singing some of the lines with him, so we ran it down a couple of times, sat down without headphones or baffling, just two acoustic guitars, and got it on the first take.

"Mark had his studio guy master it and put it on a disc; I was there a whole hour, that was it. The Irish duets with Clive Carroll were done in RAK Studios in London as well, there's a bit of everything. 'Looking Forward To The Past' with Rodney Crowell was recorded in the studio in his house. Rodney rang me and asked if I'd play on his new album, so I asked him, 'How about you come and sing on my new album and we'll do a deal?'. He said that sounded like a great idea; so I went over, worked on three of his songs and then recorded our track together."

Emmanuel has summoned up a pretty impressive list of guests. How did he choose who to invite, I ask? "Some of them I've known for a long time, but some I didn't know at all, and were brought to my attention by my manager Brian Penix. Jason Isbell had been doing so well and had a great career going here in America; I went to see his show, loved his singing and asked if he knew Doc Watson's song 'Deep River Blues'? He said that of course he did, so I asked him if he'd like to recreate it with me. He came to the studio, we recorded him singing and me playing guitar, redid my vocal part and added a bass."

His recording of the Madonna song 'Borderline' with Amanda Shires is quite a surprise. How did that come about? "Well of course Amanda is Jason's wife, and the



idea for the song came after I'd been touring in Scandinavia with a lady called Theresa Anderson; she and I worked up the number in the show with her playing violin. I showed the video we'd made to Amanda, to see if she was interested. She loved it, so we kept it all very simple. In fact, throughout the album that was my whole idea; I tried to keep the production side as basic and simple as possible, mainly just using acoustic instruments, electric on a few things."

He has JD Simo, someone I hadn't come across before, playing on 'Wheelin' & Dealin', a stupidly fast instrumental. I couldn't help wondering how many takes he might have to lay down for a track like that. "Because that was such a fast number," he replies, "I put down the rhythm on acoustic guitar using a click track, then JD came out with his old Tele and little Fender Deluxe amp. He was getting a great sound and he had about three or four passes, played a solo and went home; about an hour and it was done. I decided I wanted to extend it and add some banjo, so I got Charlie Cushman over, added bass drum and snare drum, played with brushes and suddenly it sounded like a band!"

I've seen footage on Youtube of Emmanuel playing his Telecaster, jamming in a club with Simo. Does he hang out a lot in Nashville jamming, I ask? It all looks like it could get a bit competitive! The standard of players seems ridiculously high. "Absolutely – the level of playing here is pretty damn amazing. Jack Pearson who's on the album, is one of my favourite guitar players; he's about the best guitar player in Nashville and can play anything and is so soulful. If you want to hear him, go onto Youtube and hear Jack sing and play 'Oh How Happy I Am', a Reverend Gary Davis song, it will blow your mind! There are some guys that specialise in certain things but Jack can play a Django tune, a Gary Davis song or an Allman Brothers song. Everything he plays is so authentic and real, he's at the level we all dream of being at."

With so many great players around, a lesser player could feel intimidated, but not this guy. "I try not to be," says Emmanuel. "I try to just learn, stand there and present what I do in the best way I can; it's not a competition. I've learnt so much from hearing David Grisman play, and last night Frank Vignola came and sat in and played some beautiful solos. It's just great hanging around people like that; they inspire you and it's that simple.

"Growing up in Australia it was all very stupid and competitive, but when I came to America it was exactly the opposite. People would come up and say 'Hey man, you play real well, come and play something with us, do your own thing, play your own way and we'll

> **"I try to just learn, stand there and present what I do in the best way I can; it's not a competition"**

make it work'. I've always tried to have that attitude that there's room for us all, we're all different, and if people like what we do, we're damn lucky because we've got a good job; making a living playing music and learning from each other."

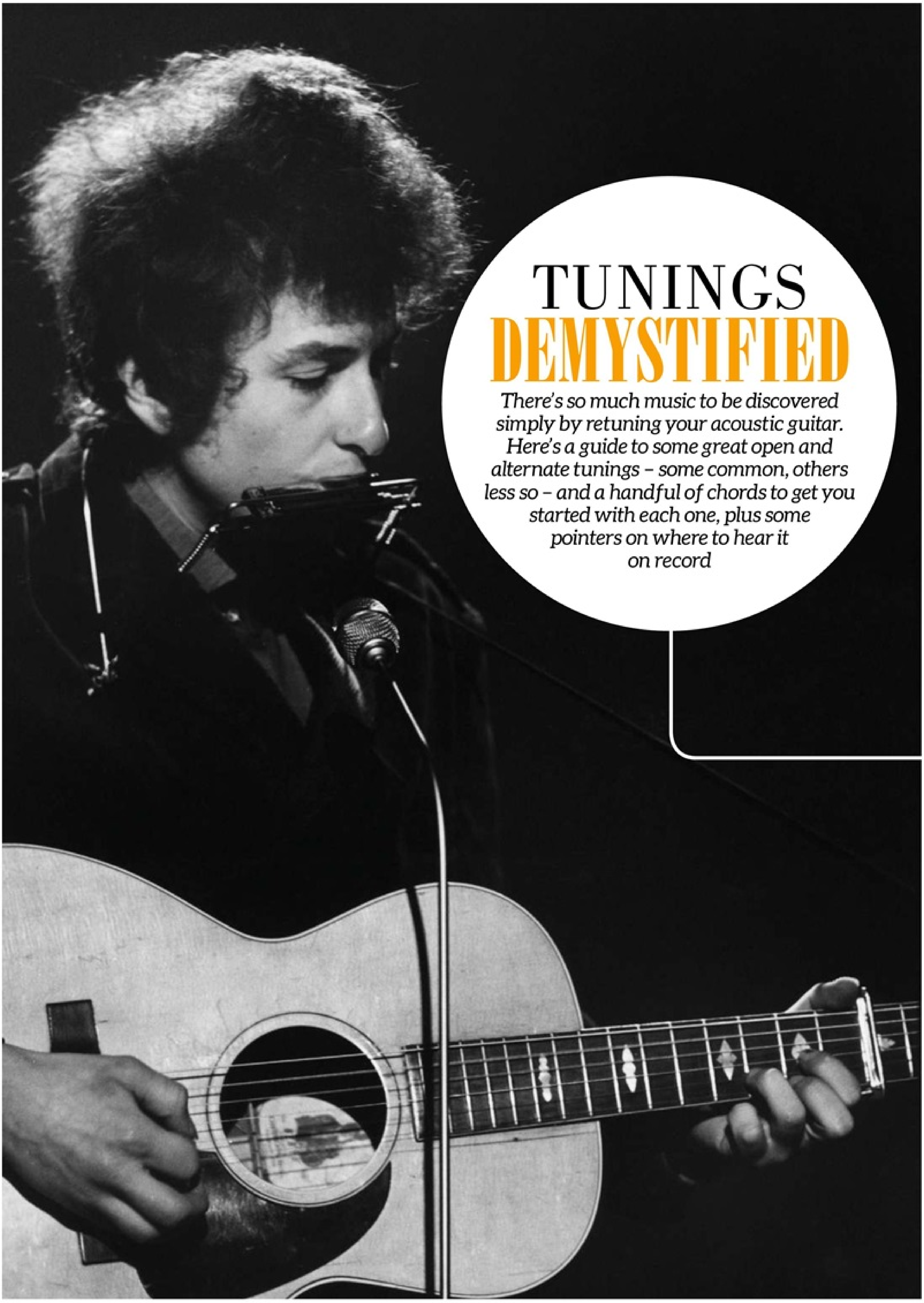
Tommy's first UK guitar camp with Richard Smith and John Knowles, will take place at Atholl Palace, Pitlochry, Scotland, between 11-15 May. "My camps are not all about finger picking," he stressed. "I teach people how to arrange songs, get their technique together, and about performance and arrangement. I try and cover everything, and we cater for everyone from beginners up; you don't have to be a good player, just love what you want to do. We break up into groups of about 30 people in each class, and have three classes a day. I take the entire group in the morning, demonstrate for the first two hours, before we break off into smaller groups with the other instructors. All I want to do is to inspire people to want to go away and play!" ■

Accomplice One **is out now.**
Info: www.tommyemmanuel.com

GEARBOX

For most of my shows I'm still playing Maton guitars, but on this tour, I've been playing a 1934 Martin 00028 belonging to David Grisman, both of us playing acoustically into a mic. The Matons have their own pickups and mics, and I go through an AER Compact 60 amp which gives a big, beautiful sound. But I have my own sound man, the best I've ever heard; he's been working with me for years, and gets the best out of the guitar.

I take one line from the guitar into an AER Colourizer preamp, and then on into the PA. I then have a bypass which goes into the AER amplifier, and then a second line from the amp straight into the PA, so it has two signals which can be mixed. I also use a 1966 Telecaster fitted with Bartolini pickups that I bought in the early 70s. And although my Matons get pretty bashed up, there was no bashing David's Martin. It's a gorgeous guitar. It's going to be hard to give it up!



TUNINGS DEMYSTIFIED

There's so much music to be discovered simply by retuning your acoustic guitar. Here's a guide to some great open and alternate tunings – some common, others less so – and a handful of chords to get you started with each one, plus some pointers on where to hear it on record

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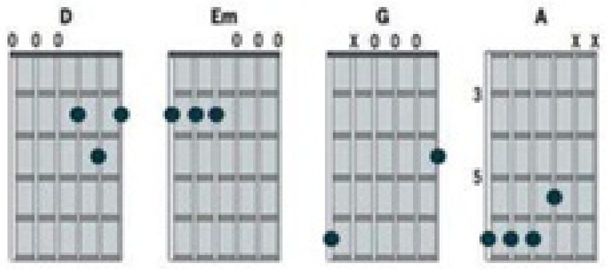
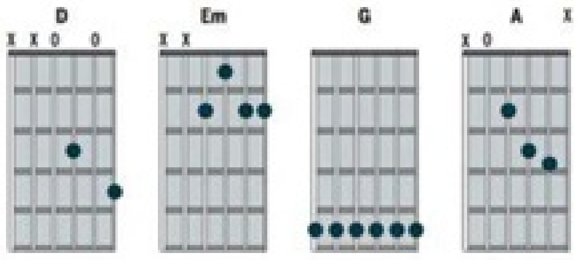


Hear it here
Mr. Tambourine Man Bob Dylan
(Bringing It All Back Home, 1965)

1 Drop D

Simply lowering the pitch of the sixth string by a tone from E to D is an easy way of adding weight to the bass, while freeing up your fretting hand to focus on melodic duties. From metal riffing to country blues, dropped D tuning enables instant one-finger power chords, and your trusty open-D chord now sounds huge!

When tackling an altered tuning, it's worth finding out where the basic major and minor triads are, and how you might play a I-IV-V chord progression. Try the starter chords we've added with each tuning example. Or just throw caution to the wind and jump right in!

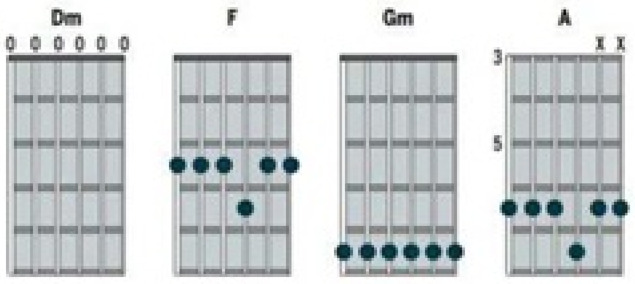


Hear it here
Babel Mumford & Sons *(Babel, 2012)*

2 Open D

The Open D tuning (named as such because, when strummed 'open', without fingering any notes with the left hand, the resulting chord corresponds to a D major chord) is a widely used tuning in folk and blues styles.

Its open nature makes it a particular favourite with slide guitar players, and the tuning also pushes the guitar's range closer to that of a piano, for greater expressiveness. Experiment with harmonics in this tuning, barring your finger across the fifth, seventh and 12th fret for some heavenly chordal strums.

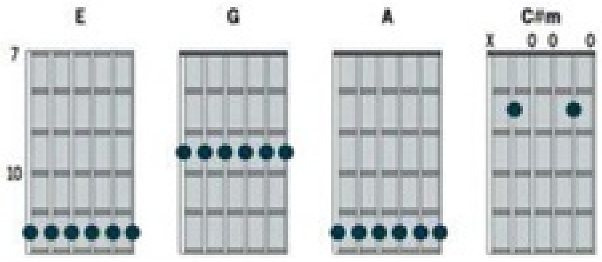


Hear it here
Hard Time Killing Floor Blues Chris Thomas King *(O Brother, Where Art Thou? Soundtrack, 2000)*

3 Open D minor

Whether you're a glass-half-full or half-empty kind of person, exploring the world of open tunings can either be a goldmine of inspiration or a pressure cooker of frustration. Trying the common drop D or DADGAD tunings for the first time, players are struck by the realisation that favourite licks sound fresh and new, simply because the notes have moved.

Open D minor tuning – surely the saddest of all tunings – is lesser used than many of the others on this list, but its minor tonality proves very atmospheric – and major chords are a doddle to find, making composition a rewarding experience.

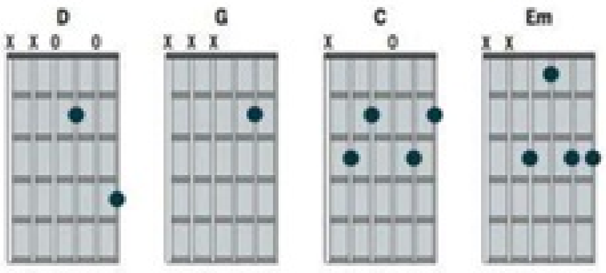


Hear it here
She Talks To Angels The Black Crowes, *(Shake Your Money Maker, 1990)*

4 Open E

Open E tuning is essentially Open D tuning, two frets higher, and so licks in one of course translate readily to the other – but it deserves attention in our roundup here because of its appeal to slide guitar players, including three of the greatest of all time in Elmore James, Joe Walsh and Derek Trucks.

As with Open D tuning, barre major chords are readily available all the way up the fretboard. Open E's increased string tension and the prevalence of songs in the key of E in blues styles makes the tuning a must-try for any would-be bottleneck player.

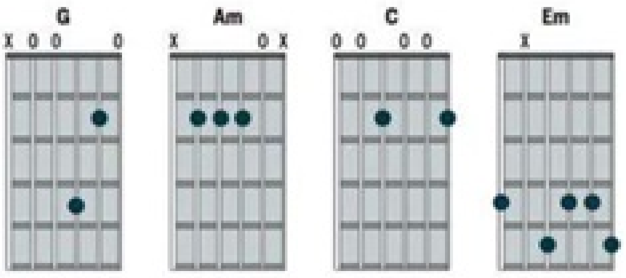


Hear it here
Black Mountain Side Led Zeppelin (*Led Zeppelin*, 1969)

5 DADGAD

DADGAD tuning is generally regarded as the discovery of the late great English folk guitarist Davey Graham, and is a revelation for many players. While enjoying the distinction of being one of the few tunings you can pronounce, it's unrivalled in its user-friendliness – all those D and A strings are brimming with drone and melodic potential.

It's classed as a 'modal' tuning, implying that it's neither major nor minor, allowing easy adaptability to various moods. Experiment: noodling in DADGAD can sound very flattering, and instantly rewarding.

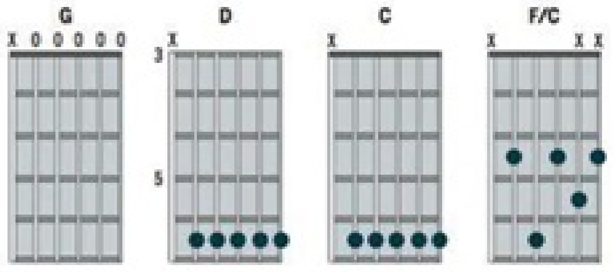


Hear it here
The Cocks Are Crowing John Doyle (*Wayward Son*, 2005)

6 Open Csus2

This is the rich and beautiful open Csus2, comprising CGCGCD, low to high. But for the ease with which DADGAD can be pronounced as a word, we struggle to see why Csus2 tuning can't share the popularity that its cousin has enjoyed.

It provides excellent scope for playing drone-like strumming accompaniment, open-string runs and deep, resonant bass notes. Some well-known exponents of the tuning include English folk legends Nic Jones and Martin Simpson, and US guitarist Steve Baugham.

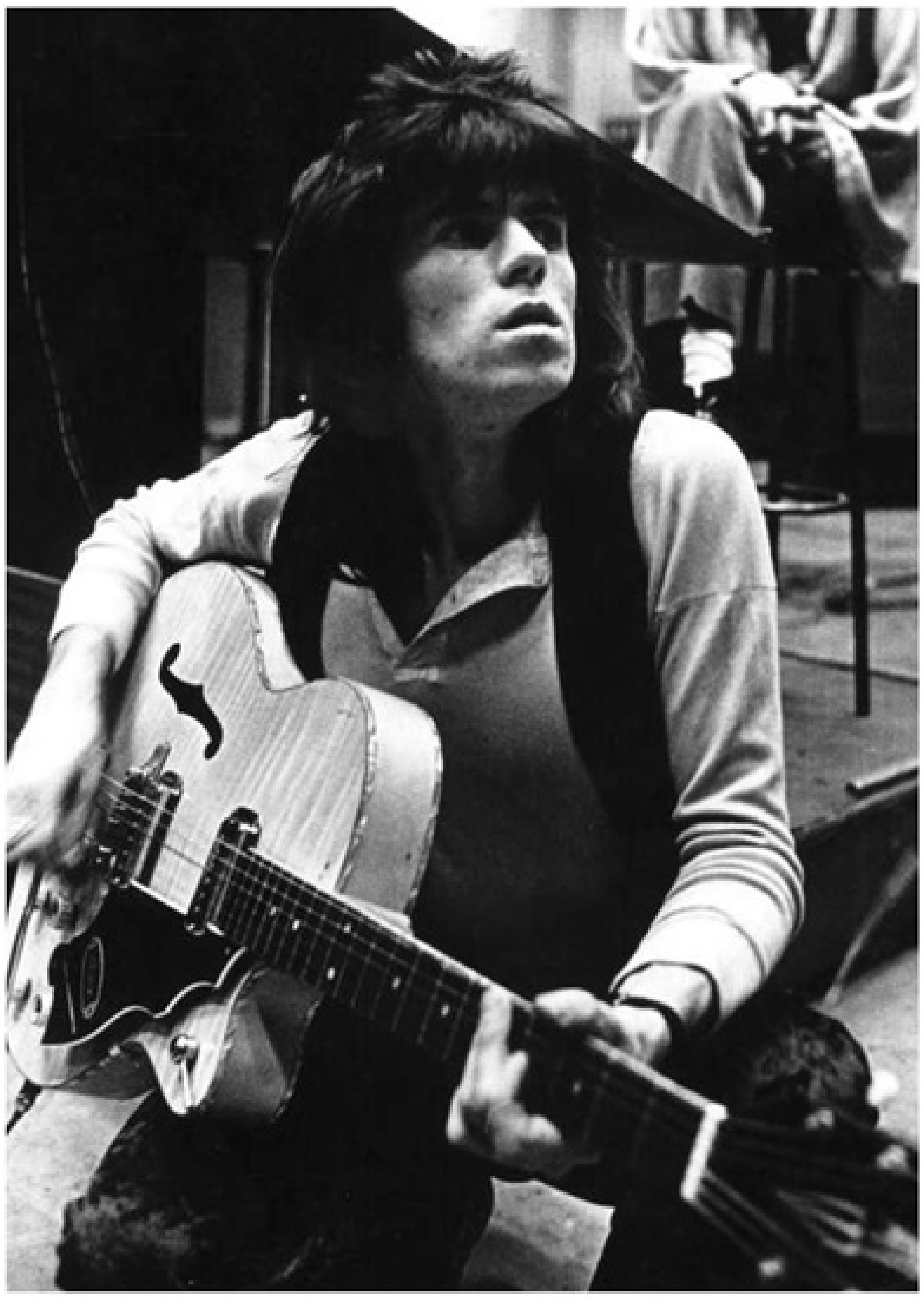


Hear it here
Wild Horses The Rolling Stones (*Sticky Fingers*, 1971)

7 Open G

Many styles use open G tuning, from the Delta blues to folk and rock. But it has become virtually synonymous with Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones – and for good reason, since its discovery was a songwriting revelation for the legendary guitarist, and many of the band's biggest hits are played using it, including 'Gimme Shelter', 'Brown Sugar' and 'Start Me Up'.

Richards removes the sixth string completely, making it easier to strum the five-string major chord. As a one-finger barre is all that's required to play a major chord, the other fingers are free to create melody notes.



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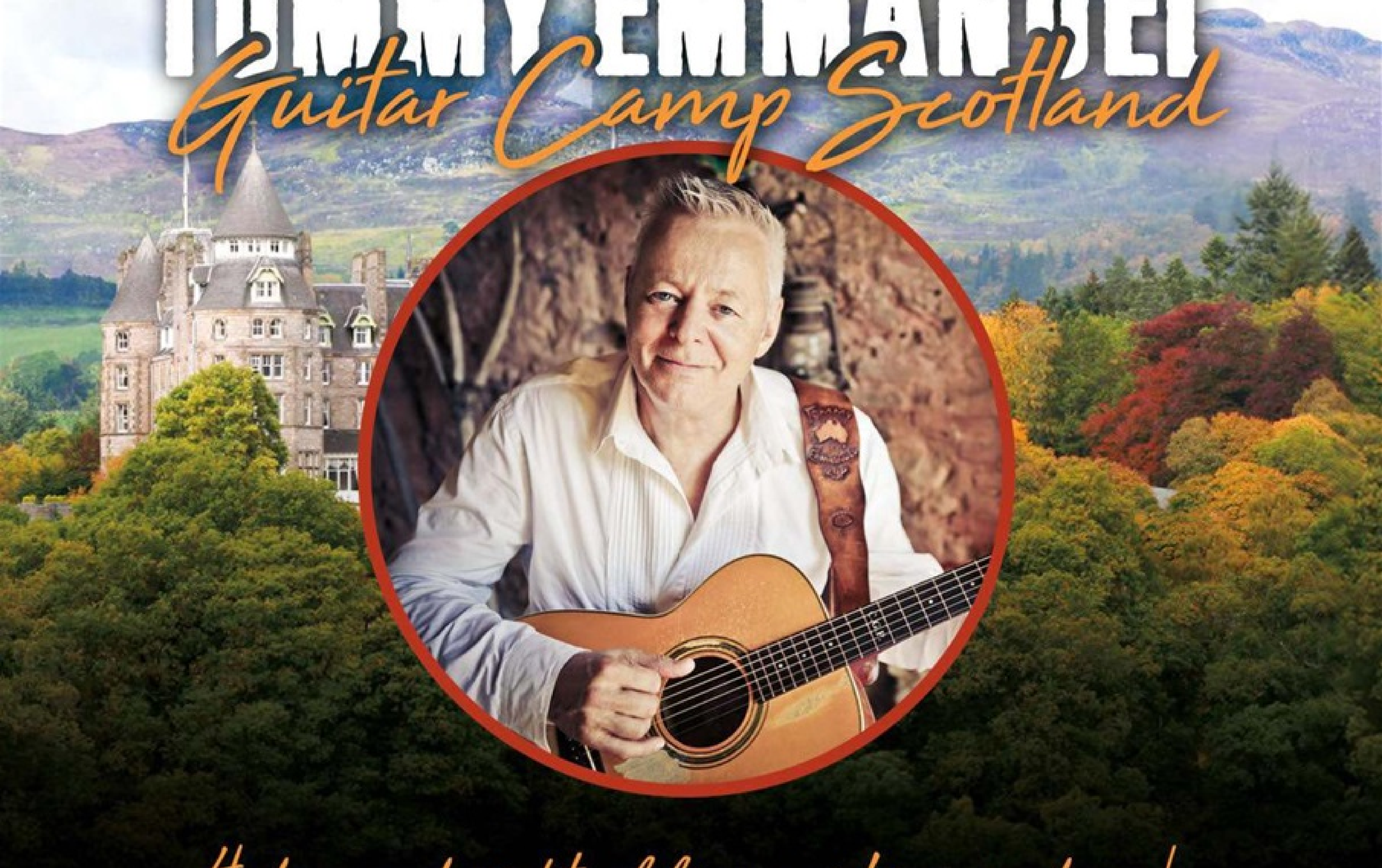

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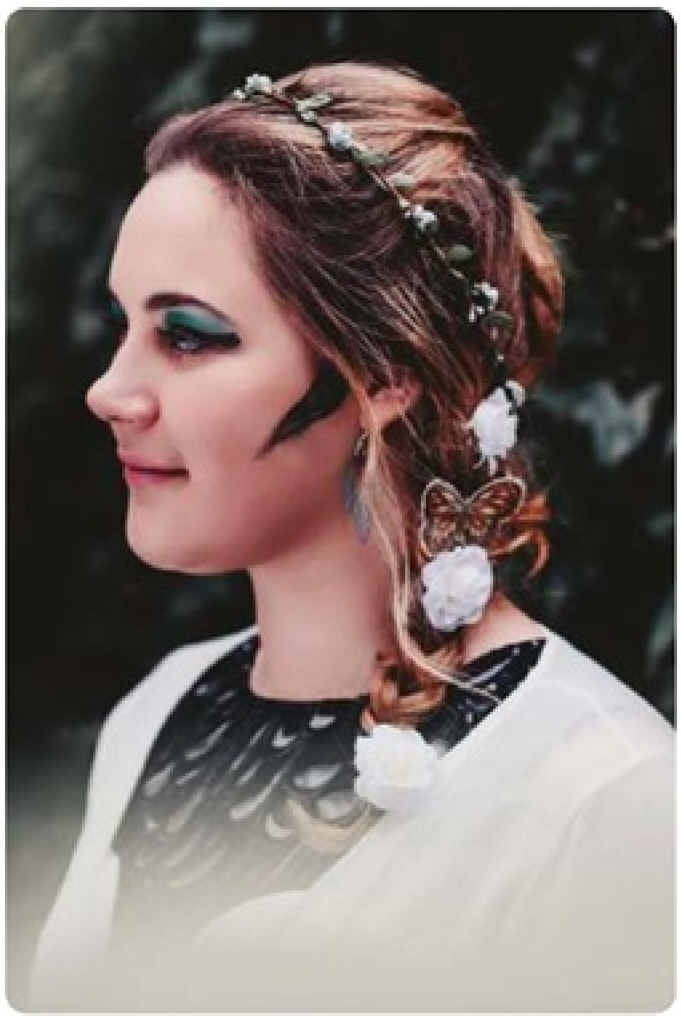

COMPANY *of* PLAYERS

When some of contemporary folk's hottest names gathered together to create an album celebrating Shakespeare's quadricentennial, the results were always going to merit a listen. Acoustic found out more...

Multi-instrumentalist folk super group Company Of Players may have more members than some Arctic explorers have toes (that is, there are 10 of them) but you better believe that each one comes bearing some seriously impressive skillsets and experience. Assembled to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare, their lineup includes (deep breath): Jess Distill (vocals, whistle, flute and shruti), Hannah Elizabeth (vocals, violin) and Kathy Pilkinton (vocals, spoons, clarinet, mandolin) of trio Said the Maiden, BBC Radio 2 Folk Award winner Sam Kelly (vocals, acoustic guitar, mandolin), Daria Kulesh (vocals, bodhran, shruti), Kelly Oliver (vocals, acoustic guitar, harmonica), Chris Cleverley (vocals, acoustic guitar, banjo), Minnie Birch (vocals, acoustic guitar), Lukas Drinkwater (vocals, double bass, electric guitar) and Kim Lowings (vocals, piano, dulcimer).

Together, they've produced the new album, *Shakespeare Songs*, an 11-track release that has already gained great reviews. We'll let the band, led by founder Jess Distill, explain...

How did the ten of you meet, then?

Jess Distill: When we had the idea to start the group, we sent an email out to everyone we wanted to have in the band. Some of them we'd met before, once or twice at gigs, some we'd seen play but never met, and some we hadn't even seen before. Most of us met through music, some not before the band was formed and some of us (Said The Maiden's members) have been friends since school.

How did each of you get into playing?

Kelly Oliver: I started playing the guitar when I was studying GSCE music, although I only had a few lessons. I'm learning how to play tunes on the guitar and the harmonica simultaneously at the moment – they're difficult to play but so much fun once you master it.

Minnie Birch: I got into playing the guitar properly at about 12 when my sister introduced me to the Seattle grunge scene. It was easy back then to form a band with three chords and a desire to be heard, so me and my friends did just that. My grandad had given me a ukulele when I was younger and taught me a George Formby tune or two and over the years I've picked it up. He recently gave me his treasured resonator ukulele which, when it stays in tune, is beautiful. I'd love to work up a live set where I can use that.

Lukas Drinkwater: I started at trad folk sessions in my local pub in Falmouth, Cornwall when I was about 13, then started doing paid gigs as a duo with pianist Jake Ashworth-Jones at 14, around Cornwall and Devon, often opening for his dad, the 60s folk legend Alun Ashworth-Jones.

Chris Cleverley: I've been playing guitar since I was a little boy, starting about 22 years ago. I had classical lessons and then got into heavy metal soloing – sweep picking, shredding etc. I encountered contemporary fingerstyle techniques at university through folk revival players like John Renbourn and Nic Jones.

How would you describe the album's sound?

Jess Distill: Harmony filled, ethereal acoustic folk. With a little bit of bluegrass and a little bit of pop. Actually, it's kind of hard to pin down. You'd have to buy the album to find out...

What motivated you to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death for your debut album?

Jess Distill: It was based on other folk supergroups that had formed over the last 18 months or so in which more established folk musicians are brought together and commissioned to write and record based on a certain theme. The idea of writing about Shakespeare was secondary to that and came about quite by chance, when I googled 'important anniversaries, 2017'. Being a Shakespeare buff, it was a no brainer to go with it, and the amount of material and ideas Shakespeare provides is limitless – a huge wealth of inspiration.

How did you go about celebrating his work in song? Is it retelling his stories in lyrics, or aiming to capture the essence, as you see it?

Jess Distill: The material ended up being a real mix of songs based on themes or particular characters from his plays, such as mental health, magic, love... words lifted directly from plays and put to new tunes, such as in 'Black Spirits' (the three witches from Macbeth) and 'It Was a Lover and His Lass' from *As You Like It*. 'You Must Needs Be Strangers' actually didn't come from a play at all but uses words Shakespeare wrote about refugees. I think what we really wanted to do was to show people that Shakespeare is still relevant today, and a lot can still be learned

about the world and the human race through what he observed and had to say so many centuries ago.

Are you happy with how the record has turned out?

Jess Distill: We're so proud of this album! We recorded it in a little over a week at the Cube Recording Studio in Cornwall. We worked with a fantastic engineer, Ross Rothero-Bourge, but produced and mixed it all ourselves, with Sam Kelly at the helm. Sam also mastered the album and did an incredible job. It's so exciting to hear an album and know all the hard work put into it was yours.

How did the songwriting process work?

Jess Distill: As individuals we all work quite differently with our own material, and coming into The Company of Players was a really interesting experience when it came to the writing process. The first time we all met up was in a house in Derbyshire, where we spent the week writing the whole album. For the most part, people came into the house with already semi or fully formed songs that the rest of the group helped arrange and put instrumentation to. Some songs were written during that week, but most of them were just shaped and polished. It was really fascinating to work with so many different styles and ways of writing. It opened a lot of eyes and taught a lot of us great discipline.

What have been your favourite moments from the project?

Minnie Birch: The whole thing has been great from first day nerves of writing with musicians I have admired for a long time, to sitting with them all eating a takeaway and laughing during our week recording. Watching Kelly Oliver record her vocals for the album was a really magical moment for me. It felt like being a part of folk history in the making.

Lukas Drinkwater: Mine was taking to the stage as a 10 piece at Looe Music Festival in 2016, having barely any rehearsal, and a rather complex stage setup and no time in which to soundcheck, yet still having a perfect show to a great crowd.

Kim Lowings: Our celebratory jam at the end of writing week, knowing we had successfully brought together songs that we were proud of. Singing and dancing with new friends!

Daria Kulesh: playing (and winning at) Cards Against Humanity. Lukas' yellow tights, worn during the group photo shoot (you don't want to know the details). Duetting 'My Heart Will Go On' on kazoo... The best part of being in this band is how much crazy fun we're having on and off the stage.

Jess Distill: My favourite thing about the project is just the fact that we managed to pull it off. Looking at the photos, and watching everyone interact, you just wouldn't think that we were practical strangers. We finished the shoot, and we all gathered around the camera to look at the photos, and I just thought, 'Yup, we're a band, we're a team'. It felt so nice and so right, and any worries I had up until that point melted away.

Clockwise from left: Sam Kelly, Hannah Elizabeth, Kim Lowings, Daria Kulesh, Chris Cleverley, Kelly Oliver, Kathy Pilkinton, Jess Distill, Lukas Drinkwater, Minnie Birch

PLAYER TIPS

Minnie Birch: I sometimes use a soft beater on the strings of my guitar to get a nice sound when I'm playing live. It's also of interest for people to watch, I always like to watch really experimental guitarists myself so always want to think of ways to use my guitar. I always end up stuck for where to place my beater when I'm done with it, so I used to cut a hole in my tights so I could slide it in there! Didn't always work – I've dropped it a few times!

Chris Cleverley: Alternate tunings are so handy for fingerstyle. A great way to open up the fretboard is to play outside of the key of the open chord. If you're in C major tuning, try transposing a song into F major without using a capo. The new shapes you'll find will create a whole new bunch of pathways. As Martin Simpson puts it, it stops the tuning from 'dictating' how you play.

Any other artists you'd recommend?

Kelly Oliver: Daoiri Farrell is my favourite at the moment – I absolutely love his voice and playing and he's hilarious so his live show is definitely one to get along to.

Minnie Birch: Two artists I'm currently really enjoying are Zoe Konez – she's a very percussive guitarist who uses a lot of tapping techniques to create a really distinct sound – and also Cappelino who uses a loop pedal to bring out the sounds of his guitar.

Lukas Drinkwater: The Little Unsaid, Edgelarks and Albert Jones are my top three

> **"The project has brought together nearly all of our favourite emerging folk artists"**

listened-to acoustic artists this year. All very different, all with new albums out now, and all mind-blowing in totally different ways. I've had the pleasure of working with each of them at some point, and I am totally humbled to know such incredible musicians.
Chris Cleverley: An upcoming fingerstyle player to look out for is Amit Dattani. Incredibly fast folk/blues picker in the style of Kelly Joe Phelps and Paul Curreri. His debut record, out now, will take the scene by storm.
Hannah Elizabeth: At the moment I am listening to a lot of Kris Drever who is one third of the trio Lau. I love his songwriting, particularly on his latest album *If Wishes Were Horses* and his singing voice is one of my all time favourites
Kim Lowings: Jimmy Aldridge, Sid Goldsmith, Maria Dunn and Jimi Charles Moody.
Daria Kulesh: The Company of Players brought together nearly all of my favourite emerging artists on the folk scene, so I can only recommend checking everyone out individually. Aside from that, I'm inspired by formidable females in music, the likes of Eliza Carthy, Loreena McKennitt, Ange Hardy and, my favourite discovery, Hannah White.

Will you be touring the album on its release?
We release the album officially in March. We're working with a fantastic theatre company called OVO, who have won lots of awards for their stagings of Shakespeare plays. They're going to be performing little monologues and scenes from Shakespeare's plays in between songs, so we're going to make it a really big, cool theatrical event. There'll be cool lighting and costumes, the lot! After that, we are slowly starting to pick up gigs here and there, but no set tour planned as yet. As you can imagine, organising 10 incredibly busy musicians who live in all four corners of the country is a real nightmare! ■

***Shakespeare Songs* is available now.**
Info: http://bit.ly/2BlQYIg, @shakespearefolk

GEARBOX

What guitars are you using for live shows?
Kelly Oliver: Taylor 412ce and Martin DX1R, and Hohner Special 20 harmonicas.
Minnie Birch: I currently use a Taylor GS Mini series with Elixir bronze strings in medium. I got this when I was looking for a second guitar, to travel with. I didn't plan on a Taylor but fell in love in the store and haven't looked back. I love the unplugged sound. It has quite a small scale so it struggles with some of my open tunings. I've had it set up so that it sits somewhere between standard and open D happily but she's never really 100% happy being tuned down too low. In COP we have enough requests for instrument outputs without me adding another. So I often keep to standard tuning and to my trusty Taylor!
Chris Cleverley: I play a Martin Performing Artist Series OMCPA4 with Elixir 12s. It's a great model for fingerstyle with excellent tone and a neck that's suited to gliding up and down. I run this through an AER Alpha amp, which gives amazing control over your live sound. Mandolin – Ashbury style electro mandolin (kindly on loan from Hannah Elizabeth). Spoons - from Wilkinsons.
Kim Lowings: Walnut McSpadden Appalachian Mountain dulcimer with a LR Baggs dulcimer undersaddle pickup. ■

ZOE WREN

We caught up with the 22-year-old winner of the PRS Fund's Lynsey de Paul prize for emerging female singer-songwriters

We try not to get too topical in these pages, but if you want an interesting musical riposte to late 2017's grubbier red-top headlines – albeit via some 17th century lore – take a listen to Zoe Wren's latest single, 'She's a Highwayman', released last month. The first track from her second EP *Gold and Smoke*, sees the 22-year-old Cambridge graduate dig deep into forgotten or overlooked female-centric histories. Championed by Ralph McTell and Radio 2's Bob Harris, you'd hardly believe Wren had only just graduated from university this year. With the upbeat earnest zeal of her 60s and 70s forebears, Wren is a guitarist whose impressive education, we hope, is only the start of her CV...

What can we expect from the new EP?

Although the EP is very much rooted in the folk tradition, I've given most of the songs a modern twist, both lyrically and musically. There's a definite feminist thread running through, for example 'She's A Highwayman' is an update on folk's sassiest heroine, and 'If I Had A Voice' talks back to a persistent man who won't take no for an answer. In terms of the music, I'm really excited about the production on this EP. I worked in the studio with Folkstock's award-winning producer Lauren Deakin Davies, and we came up with a really full, lush sound – expect some mandolin, flute, violin, piano and more. We figured out that we play about eight instruments between us, so there was a lot to work with.

Your musical studies sound like they were fascinating. Tell us more...

The Music course I studied at Cambridge was very 'classical', including lots of harmony and counterpoint, analysis and history, though I took as many non-classical courses as I could, and studied topics ranging from blues to flamenco to hip hop. And, of course, I managed to get in some folk music – I wrote my final dissertation on women in folk music, using a mixture of musical analysis and feminist theory to look at the ways in which female artists have subverted a very male-dominated tradition to use folk music as a way of voicing wide-ranging and often 'unsung' experiences of women. Doing research for this got me thinking a lot about gender and personas and different voices in traditional songs, and what that might mean for contemporary singer-songwriters. It also really opened my eyes to assumptions we make about music and the kinds of inequalities ingrained into society and music, but it was overall a hugely positive experience, and it influenced several of the themes of the songs on my new EP. Which I realise is a bit unusual – I'm not sure many people would say that their university dissertation shaped their songwriting!

> "I try to be as creative as I can in my songwriting"

How would you describe your style to people who haven't heard it before?

It sits somewhere in between traditional and contemporary folk and pop. The focus is on using my voice to tell stories, which are a mix of traditional, other peoples' and my own. I try to be as creative as I can in my songwriting, and explore different modes and interesting harmonies.

How, and at what age, did you first get into playing the guitar?

I must've been about 10 or 11 when I first picked up a guitar. I didn't have any formal training, and I was always more of a noodler. The main reason I decided to learn was to accompany myself while I sing, and it's really in the last few years that I've been taking practising guitar much more seriously!

I've been singing for as long as I can remember, and my love of singing in a folk or pop style has always gone hand in hand with a passion for choral singing. I had singing lessons while I was at school and uni, though it was in a more classical style, which is surprisingly different to how I sing when I'm gigging. When I'm singing folk or more contemporary songs I don't tend to think about vocal technique, and just sort of let it happen.

Do you come from a musical family?

Not at all! Both my parents love listening to music – which I think is where I got my love of folk music and 60s and 70s singer-songwriters from – but neither of them really got into playing instruments. My brother Zak has always had a feel for rhythm and percussion, and took up the bodhran a couple of years ago, so we sometimes play gigs together, which we both really enjoy. He features on almost all the tracks in the EP, and really enhances the songs, as the bodhran is such a versatile instrument.

Who were your early musical influences?

My early musical listening was pretty old school, and that's always stayed with me. Joni Mitchell, Tracy Chapman and Joan Baez were some of my first musical heroes, along with Simon and Garfunkel, James Taylor and Fairport Convention, among others. Of course there was also plenty of dubious noughties pop and rock when I was younger, but I'd like to think that didn't influence me too much...

Who is inspiring you these days?

I definitely go through phases. I've been listening to Laura Marling a lot recently, particularly *I Was An Eagle* – such a good album – and a fair bit of KT Tunstall and PJ Harvey, as well as plenty of artists that are neither folky nor acoustic: Laura Mvula, Bjork, Alice Coltrane, Hiatus Kaiyote, Flying Lotus, Kendrick Lamar. I love a lot of different genres so I like to keep my playlists varied. I have a feeling that the next songs I write will move a bit further away from traditional folk and draw on a wider set of influences.

Do you play any other instruments?

My main instrument is the piano, which I've played since I was about six or seven.

Player Tips

Whenever I have to play guitar for hours on end for any reason, whether it's an intensive few days in the studio or several hours of busking followed by a gig, I put a thin layer of superglue over my fingers, and it's amazing at fending off any pain or blisters! I learnt that from a sound engineer at the Roundhouse studios.

Unfortunately it's not very portable so I don't play it for gigs, which is more or less why I took up the guitar. I don't practice the piano as much as I used to, but I certainly still play from time to time. I'm a sucker for Romantic Impressionist music – Ravel, Debussy etc. I can get by on a couple of other instruments – flute, bass and ukulele – which is useful for recording, but I probably wouldn't play them live. Yet!

How do you go about writing songs?
It varies a lot, but I very rarely write my best songs when I sit down and try – it's a bit frustrating! I wrote most of my new single 'She's A Highwayman' on the train back to London from a recording session, and I got the idea for 'If I Had A Voice' while I was cleaning the bathroom. Glamorous, I know. Obviously I had to stop what I was doing immediately and go and figure it out on the guitar, much to the dismay of my flatmate who came home from a run to find the shower inaccessible! So usually, I'll start with a small idea that randomly occurs to me, more often musical, but sometimes lyrical too, and from there I'll develop it by obsessively working and reworking ideas until I'm happy. I tend to avoid simple 'four-chord' patterns (although some great songs have that format, and I occasionally use it too). I prefer to push myself to expand musical ideas in ways that are harmonically less predictable.

"I push myself to expand musical ideas that are less predictable"

What's been your career highlight so far?
There have been a few standouts, like getting my song 'Nothing To See' played on Bob Harris' show on BBC Radio 2 (though it was at about 6am when I was still fast asleep!), and winning the financial bursary from PRS Foundation. From a performance perspective, being picked to play in Brian McNeil's Festival Session on Stage 2 of the Cambridge Folk Festival is up there, and I think the best highlight of my career came very recently – and lasted about 10 minutes! The legendary Ralph McTell has been incredibly generous in setting up an initiative to get emerging singer-songwriters heard by big audiences, and welcomed applications to perform in opening slots at his shows in his Autumn tour. I was extremely fortunate to be one of the opening acts for his concert at the Cambridge Corn Exchange last month. It's such a cool venue, and definitely the biggest audience I've ever played to. The whole experience, including meeting Ralph and watching his set afterwards, was wonderful, and I felt very lucky.

Which artist, dead or alive, would you most like to perform with?
The first answer that comes to mind is Joni Mitchell, as I really look up to her as a songwriter, although in all honesty I think I'd be a bit intimidated!

Which song do you most wish you wrote?
If I had to pick one, I think it would be 'Amelia' by Joni Mitchell. It's one of my favourite songs by her. I love the whole album *Hejira*, but that track stands out to me. It's so beautiful, and well crafted – it evokes this sense of intense loneliness on the road while being poetic and enigmatic. I love the chord structure too – the melody seems so effortless but there's a lot going on behind it.

Any artist recommendations for us?
Minnie Birch's album, *Tethered*: wonderful singer-songwriter. Daria Kulesh: beautiful songs inspired by her Russian heritage. Ben Smith and Jimmy Brewer: I love the way their voices blend together. I'll be opening Lauren Housely's album launch at St Pancras Old Church this month – I love her country vibe. I saw Laura Oakes live the other day: excellent voice and catchy songs.

How has winning the PRS Fund's Lynsey de Paul prize help so far?
Not only has the bursary funded my EP recording, but it also comes with a mentoring scheme which I'm looking forward to. I'll definitely get back to songwriting soon – I'd love to record a full album next. ■

Gold and Smoke **is out now.**
Info: www.zoewren.com

GEARBOX
Live shows: just me and my guitar, a Turner 84CE. Although it can be temperamental, I'm very fond of it! Occasionally, if I need my own sound equipment for a small gig, I'll use my busking setup. I'm a licensed London Underground busker – you can catch me most days on the Piccadilly Line! – so it's important to have a good quality but portable setup. My old Vox amp finally gave up a few weeks ago, and I've replaced it with a Roland Mobile AC Acoustic Chorus Amp which I love – it's ridiculously tiny and light.

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TIM HART

The Australian Boy & Bear drummer-turned-solo-troubadour chats to us about his second album The Narrow Corner

It's a sad irony that 30-something Australian musician Tim Hart shares a name with the late Steeleye Span musician (no relation), but in terms of folk credentials Tim the younger isn't doing too badly in his own right. While his day job has been drumming for Sydney folk-rockers Boy & Bear, this musician's acoustic guitar work is far from shabby either.

Following his debut album in 2012, *Milling the Wind*, his second, *The Narrow Corner*, was mostly written on the road with Boy & Bear, and as such covers themes like how travel alters perspective. With comparisons to Elliott Smith, Simon & Garfunkel, Crowded House and Augie March, the new album features organ, banjo and synths but, as he told *Acoustic*, his guitar arsenal included Martins and Guilds to boot. More than enough reason for a chat...

How would you describe your music?
I guess I play folk music. Maybe folk rock but that's a pretty dated term these day isn't it?

The new album is out this month. What can we expect from it?
My first record was very stripped back, raw. This album leans slightly more to a band vibe while retaining the singer-songwriter style.

Are you happy with how it has turned out?
Very happy considering it's been a while since my first album in 2012.

Indeed. Was it strange, then, writing songs again and being back in the studio?
Not really, I've been writing and recording the whole time with the band (Boy & Bear) I play drums for so it was pretty natural. I just didn't have a lot of time so that was the main frustration. Studio time felt like cramming for exams.

What are your plans for 2018?
World domination... or maybe just a few solo tours. Hopefully UK again, definitely Australia. We'll see how we go.

I see you've been touring with Stu Larsen recently (whom we featured recently). How's life on the road with Stu?
Life is very good on the road with Stu. We are really good mates, we actually met nine years ago when both of us were starting out. It feels pretty natural for us to be touring together.

What do you like about life on the road?
I love seeing new places and meeting some new people.

What's been the worst thing about touring for you?
Being away from family and friends I think.

We've talked about your role in Boy & Bear. What do you prefer, though, drumming with the band or playing the guitar solo?
I like both… kind of like how I enjoy both beer and wine.

How, and at what age, did you first got into playing the guitar?
I was 15 I think, listening to a lot of Pearl Jam and Alice in Chains at the time.

What was the first song you learned?
I think it was 'Wish You Were Here' by Pink Floyd.

When did you first get into playing the drums?
I was 12 years old and wanted to play in the church band.

How did you get into playing music at a professional level?
I came home from traveling in 2008 and I think I just made a decision to not do any other job until I could live off music. A whole bunch of rubbish gigs later I was very lucky to see that realised.

Tell us about some of your early musical influences…
Paul Simon was the biggest one and is still the most influential to me.

Any other inspirations these days?
I love a whole lot of stuff from artists like Nick Drake, to Joni Mitchell, Kurt Vile, The War On Drugs, Sigur Ros.

What gear do you use for live shows?
Just a Guild D125 which I bought in New York seven years ago, plugged straight in and off we go. I have a Martin 000C David Gray Signature model back home which is cool as it's a prototype and there's only four of them. But I haven't toured it before.

Tell me about your songwriting process…
I guess I like to write a hook of some sort on guitar or melodically and I build a theme and structure around that hook… it's different every time.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?
The highlight would have to be the fact I'm still able to do this thing full time. I've met so many great people and played so many amazing places. I'm very lucky.

> **"Don't be lazy with lyrics; always be 100 percent committed"**

Which artist, dead or alive, would you most like to perform with?
Peter Gabriel.

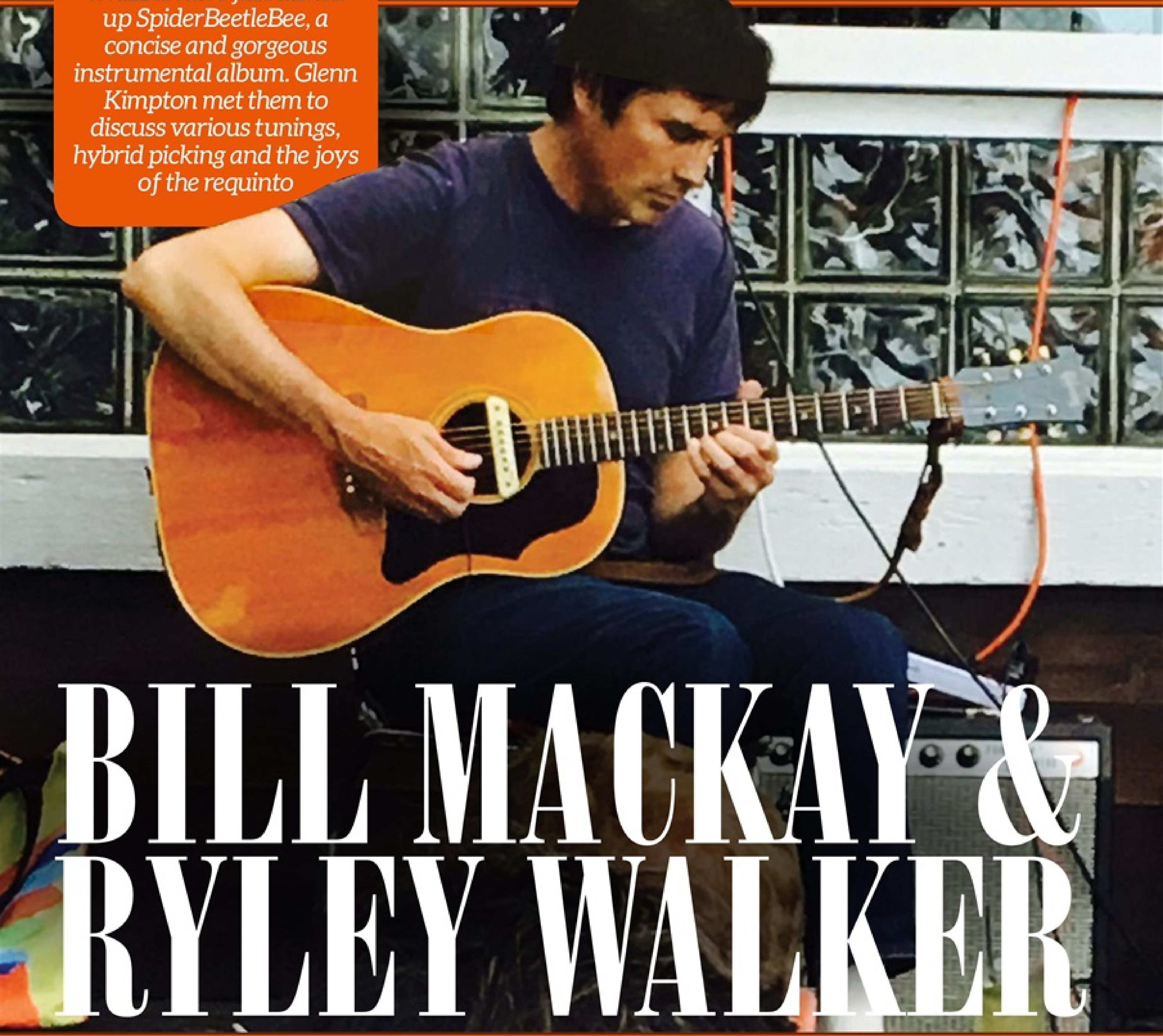
Which song do you most wish you had written?
Tough. Maybe Fleetwood Mac's 'Dreams'.

Any advice you could share?
I think every artist should work as hard as they can on songs. Don't be lazy with lyrics and always be 100 per cent committed to your performance.

Any artists or band floating your boat right now?
Sam Amidon and Denison Witmer would be two that come to mind. ■

***The Narrow Corner* by Tim Hart is out this month.**
Info: www.facebook.com/Timhartmusic

The two Chicago guitar whizzes have just dished up SpiderBeetleBee, a concise and gorgeous instrumental album. Glenn Kimpton met them to discuss various tunings, hybrid picking and the joys of the requinto



BILL MACKAY & RYLEY WALKER

Back in 2015, after a residency at The Whistler venue in Chicago, Bill MacKay and Ryley Walker released the spliced live album *Land of Plenty*, a seven-song set that is at points gentle, dense and epic. Due to record label issues, that album was pressed only once and now commands some high bids for its vinyl; it's the album that Walker once laughed about being "so good it's been banned". This year sees its follow-up, *SpiderBeetleBee*, an altogether gentler and more concise recording that came together rather quicker, but will hopefully have more of a shelf life. "Well, I had just finished recording an album and had some studio time left," explains Walker. "So I just called MacKay up and asked if he wanted to come in and work on some stuff together. We weren't sure first of all if this one would be released or not."

The sessions would prove to be rich, with the first becoming Walker's *Golden Sings That Have Been Sung*, his third and best solo album, and the second making up *SpiderBeetleBee*, a different but no less impressive set of songs. "I think we had about 70 percent of the material before we went in," MacKay adds. "It wasn't so long after the other one was released, and we had music to work on and various ideas, and then there was stuff that just came out when we were playing together." *SpiderBeetleBee* clocks in at just 32 minutes over eight tracks, meaning that it's a good 15 minutes shorter than its predecessor, but its brevity further lends the album the feeling of a polished gem.

"Yeah, I really like the length of it too," agrees Walker. "It's supposed to be a comedown record, to listen to if you've been out all night. Really, though, with our musical backgrounds, we're just two guys playing rock'n'roll tunes together, and they're good, short songs."

The pair work intuitively together, as the new set shows. One highlight 'Pretty Weeds Revisited' has a powerful core tune, but also wonderful playing, with the duo working perfectly together alongside an effective cello line that just hangs back. "It's real easy playing alongside Bill," Walker smiles. "He can play over pretty much anything, so I just come along with something I've made up with some strange whack tuning and say, 'Hey listen to this!' and he can just start playing over it."

L-R: Bill Mackay and Ryley Walker

"It was also really cool to be able to have friends playing on there too," adds MacKay. "Chicago's a great city for all kinds of music, so having Katinka Kleijn [cello] and Ryan [Jewell, tabla] come in and play was awesome."

When it comes to guitar tunings, Walker plays around a lot, but mainly sticks to his open C and D staples alongside standard variations ("I've gotten into one where you tune the low E up to G and everything else is in standard"). "I never have any idea what he's doing!" laughs Bill, about Walker. "I myself barely ever leave standard; I still feel there is so much there, so much colour and so on, that I haven't felt the need to really move from it much, although I do love to drop the low E to D at times. And I only once in a while use a capo, but that's quite rare. Though I'm often thought to be a fingerpicker I'm really a hybridist; I nearly always use a mix of flatpicking and using the free fingers to pick and pluck strings at the same time. That mix really allows me a lot of freedom."

Aside from a particularly unusual Spanish that we'll come to, the album's gear lineup was modest. On *Land of Plenty*, Walker mixed up his usual Guild dreadnought with an old Martin D12-28 12-string, but on *SpiderBeetleBee*, he just stayed with the six-string. "Yeah, I just used my Guild D-140 on this record," he tells us. "I stuck an LR Baggs M1 magnetic soundhole pickup on it and fed it through a Tonebone PZ-Deluxe preamp; those things make the acoustic guitar sound amazing." MacKay also stuck to just the one six-string, one he has owned for many years. "I have a Yamaha FG-140 from 1972," he tells us. "My dad and I went to a place called House of Guitars, in Rochester, New York, and he bought me that guitar from a guy on the doorstep of the shop for about 80 bucks. Its looks are rather everyday, but it's certainly deceiving; it has a crisp, singing sound, at least when it's working right!" And like Walker, MacKay also champions the Radial Tonebones. "Yeah I use one of those too, although Bill's is larger," he continues. "Mine is a PZ-Pre, which is slightly simpler, but it's still great."

While the type of Yamaha that MacKay uses now fetches good money online, his other instrument, a Spanish originating requinto, is altogether less common. "My requinto was built by Ramon Gutierrez Hernandez, from Mexico, a wonderful player and luthier. My one is a five-string, but many are four, and it's tuned EADGC, in line with standard guitar tuning." So an easy transition to an obscure instrument? "Well, you have to get used to it, because it has a coarser feeling on the neck than typical acoustics, but once you're there, it really sings. The range of sounds you can reach are fascinating, from banjo and mandolin to guitar and ukulele. Depending on your force, touch, picking style and so on, you can get really close to tones from all of those guitaristic instruments. The body's really small too, but the volume is huge when you let it resonate." ■

***SpiderBeetleBee* is out now on Drag City**

MY GRANDFATHER'S MARTIN

Reader Ben Wilson tells us the moving story of his grandfather's beloved, beleaguered Martin 00-17 – and how it gained its battle scars

During World War II, my grandfather, Ted Wilson, was recruited to the British 7th Armoured Division, more famously known as 'The Desert Rats'. He worked across Northern Africa, cracking codes for the British. Ted learned fluent Arabic and formed relationships with locals; immersing himself in the culture and uncovering enemy tactics. He also taught Arab forces to speak English, enabling them to discover information that the Brits could not.

In May 1942, Ted met an American pilot in Egypt. After operating on a series of missions together, the two men bonded over a shared love of music and performing in a ragtag army band. As music was the primary source of entertainment in the desert, soldiers would laugh, sing, dance, and play the night away to forget about the horrific scenes they had all witnessed. When their respective platoons were dispatched to different areas, separating the friends, the American soldier presented a Martin 00-17 guitar to Ted as a reminder of their time together. My grandfather was humbled beyond words and vowed to take the Martin with him everywhere. Wherever Ted travelled, the guitar did too. Constantly on the move throughout the war, he would pitch camp and sing songs of home. With his guitar in one hand and rifle in the other, the two sides of Ted's military life could not be clearer.

One blisteringly hot day Ted was on a mission – his guitar strapped to the outside of his vehicle – when the Germans opened fire on his convoy, taking the British by surprise. As bullets whistled by and missiles flew through the air, almighty explosions of thick dust clouds meant Ted could not see his hands in front of his face. The attack carried on throughout the day and into the night relentlessly. My grandfather thought it was the end for every soldier in his platoon.

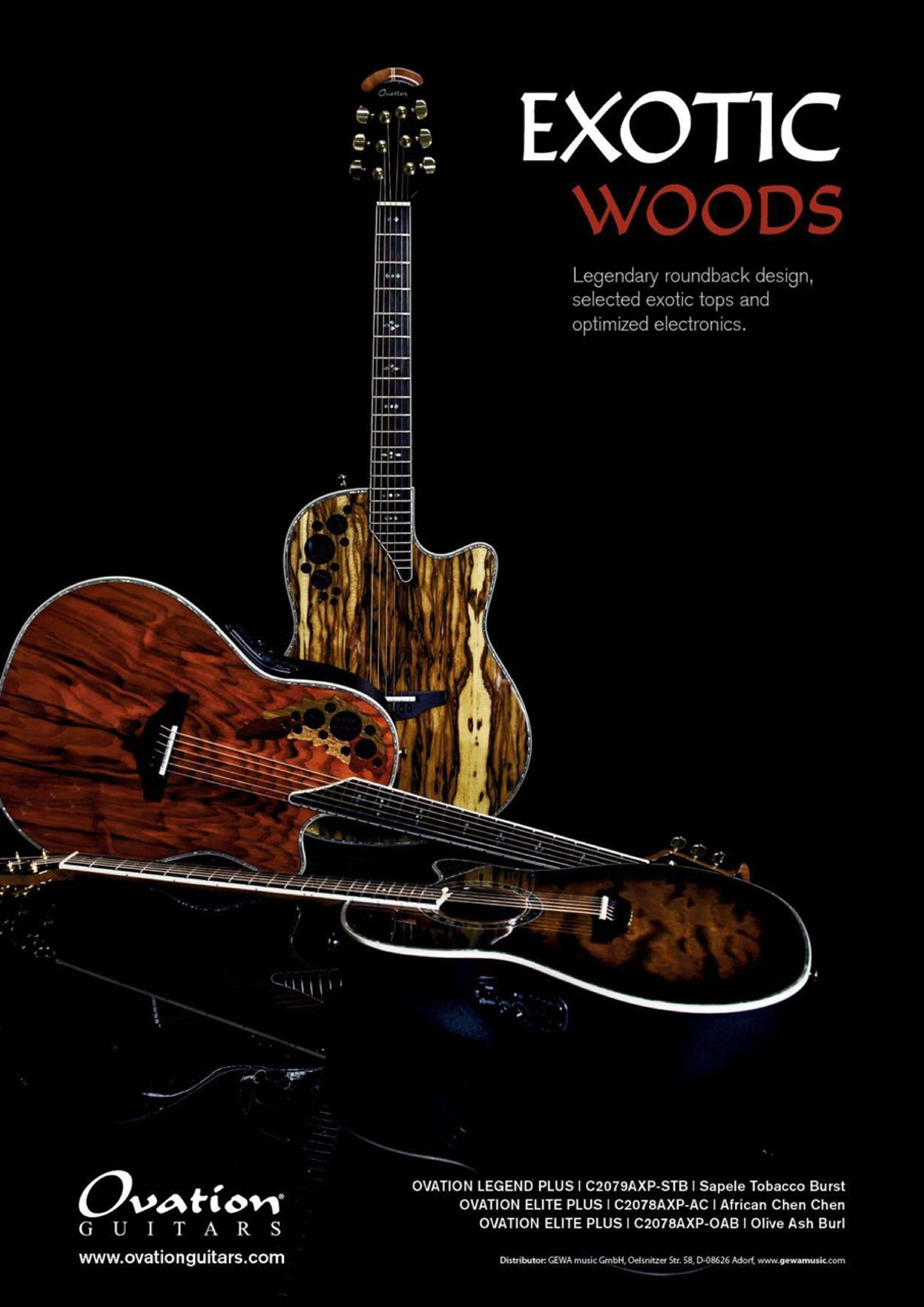
Then, suddenly, the attack stopped. No one could understand why the Nazis had halted their relentless attack; the Brits were surrounded, outnumbered and outgunned. It suddenly switched from a heart-stopping shower of bullets to a deafening silence. Realising their opportunity, Ted and his platoon made a break for it. He strapped his beloved guitar to his back and the men sneaked off into the night, reaching base camp the following morning. That night he joined up with fellow musicians to entertain and lift the spirits of their friends with a couple of rabble-rousing tunes. The guitar has a scar right beside the sound hole; a mark of their lucky escape. It's believed this crack occurred when the soldiers were taken by surprise and had to quickly hit the deck to avoid an inevitable end. Better than having a bullet removed, my grandfather used to tell me.

For one mission, Ted travelled from Egypt to Jordan on a motorcycle. With his beloved guitar strapped to his back, he voyaged through remote mountains, pitching camp. He remembered one time when he was sat at the top of the Syrian mountains looking down across at a battle taking place below; watching rockets zoom through the air. The next morning before the sun rose, he strapped his old Martin guitar to his back, kick-started his dust-ridden motorcycle and continued his journey through the mountains.

There is something quite humbling about this guitar. Its simplistic beauty produces a sound like no other guitar ever could. It's the true essence of a workhorse guitar. This veteran Martin is quite extraordinary – I've never known a guitar to have such a story behind it. Travelling through the desert, in extreme temperatures, it still has a flawlessly straight neck – just like the day it left the factory in 1933.

After surviving the war and the desert, Ted performed throughout the 60s and 70s across Europe, Scandinavia and Russia. Ted never saw his American friend again and never found out if he survived the war. With his Martin 00-17 strapped to his back, Ted carried the memory of his kind friend with him the world over. ■

For videos, visit: goo.gl/rRwZxr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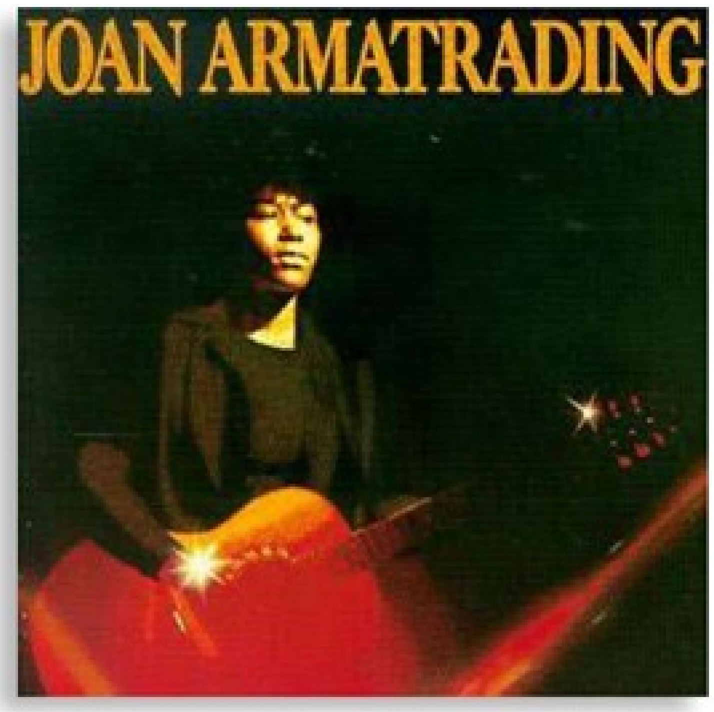
30 Classic Acoustic Guitar Albums

If you want to immerse yourself in some of the finest acoustic music ever made, check these albums out…



JOAN ARMATRADING

JOAN ARMATRADING (1976)

1 The archetypal Joan Armatrading album effortlessly blends eclectic folk with sophisticated pop. It also boasts the classic 'Love And Affection', a big hit single for her. On the strength of it, the album blazed a trail both commercially and artistically. A unique brand of poetic, confessional lyrics are sung with her trademark vocal technique of switching from warm 'normal' voice into an airy falsetto. Her sensitive guitar style and beautiful melodies make it one of the best singer-songwriter albums of all time. She played six and 12-string Ovations on the album.

JOAN BAEZ

JOAN BAEZ (1960)

2 After her first appearance at the 1959 Newport Folk Festival, Joan was signed to Vanguard, who at the time were a relatively small folk label. Her first studio album for them, *Joan Baez*, was released in 1960. It was a record with deep material and plenty of emotion. Most of the songs on this classic folk album have their origins in the old country, be that England or Africa, Spain or deepest Appalachia. Her version of 'Silver Dagger', an Appalachian ballad, is haunting, while 'Preso Numero Nueve' is a forerunner of her later strong political views. A rewarding listen!

MARTIN CARTHY

MARTIN CARTHY (1965)

3 Martin Carthy's self-titled debut album, his first for the Fontana label, was one of the most important folk releases of the 1960s. The album features a variety of traditional and contemporary folk songs, which Martin would regularly perform live throughout his career. It represents a master of British folk music in the best of traditions. Highlights include the 17th century-style 'And A Begging I Will Go', the emotional Irish revolutionary ballad, 'The Wind That Shakes The Barley', and a version of 'Scarborough Fair', from which Paul Simon famously borrowed.

JOHNNY CASH

AT SAN QUENTIN (1969)

4 The quintessential live album by Johnny Cash was recorded at the height of his 'wild' years. Although *At Folsom Prison* was released first, fans are torn between the two as to which is best. Playing to a receptive audience, it is clear that Johnny is at one with the crowd. He is clearly on the edge as he tears through jailhouse ballads, 'Starkville City Jail' and 'San Quentin' and classic hits 'I Walk The Line' and 'Ring Of Fire'. The real standout is Cash's version of Shel Silverstein's 'A Boy Named Sue', where he shows his absolute mastery.

TRACY CHAPMAN

TRACY CHAPMAN (1988)

5 One of the most stunning debuts of all time, instantly establishing Chapman as a major force. Covering issues like domestic violence, racial division and economic injustice, the album offers both immediacy and integrity of purpose. One of the best features of her lyrics is that they offer optimism for change. There are many highlights, but 'Talkin' Bout A Revolution' is one of those rare songs that remains both topical and timeless. Chapman unsurprisingly went on to win many Grammys, but her debut remains essential for the uninitiated.

ERIC CLAPTON

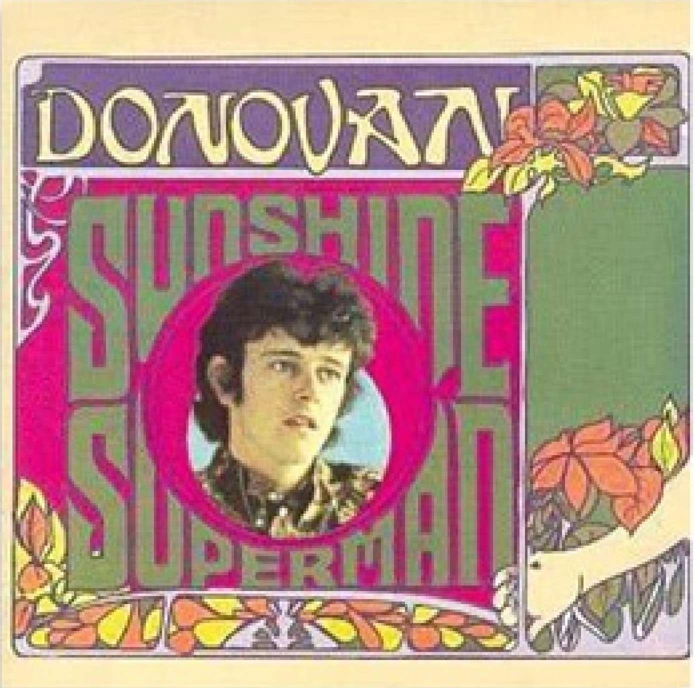
UNPLUGGED (1992)

6 This was Clapton's first album release after the tragic death of his son, Conor. The *Unplugged* series was just gathering momentum at the time, so a hungry public were keen to hear how Eric's songs would hold up when stripped of slick studio production values. Clapton himself was baffled by the huge success of the album. The obvious highlight is the heartbreaking 'Tears In Heaven', an elegy to his young son. That, along with a reworked version of 'Layla', got most of the attention but, in reality, *Unplugged* was also a fine blues album.

AL DI MEOLA, PACO DE LUCIA & JOHN MCLAUGHLIN

FRIDAY NIGHT IN SAN FRANCISCO (1980)

7 This Grammy-Award winner is considered by many to be one of the best live acoustic guitar albums ever recorded. The music is strongly influenced by flamenco and the only instruments played are the three acoustic guitars of McLaughlin, Al Di Meola and Paco de Lucía. Highlights include the ferocious opener, 'Mediterranean Sundance', and an Egberto Gismonti piece, 'Frevo Rasgado', which features a beautiful melody with stunning improvisation leading into an apocalyptic finale.



DONOVAN

SUNSHINE SUPERMAN (1967)

8 This was one of the earliest, and finest, examples of psychedelic pop topped with a sprinkling of folk and jazz. An affectionate nod to fellow folkie, Bert Jansch, 'Bert's Blues' is just one of the many gems to be found on this album. However, the two main highlights are clearly 'Sunshine Superman' and 'Season Of The Witch'. The first is a summer sing-a-long favourite, whilst the second, a moody eve-of-destruction tale. The rest is filled with lengthy, abstract folk jams. Donovan surrounded himself with some of the finest session musicians in order to pull this off.

NICK DRAKE

PINK MOON (1972)

9 Nick Drake is the perfect example of the tortured poet who wasn't appreciated in his own time and died far too young. The lack of appreciation and commercial success both contributed to his chronic depression. It took decades for the world to catch up. *Pink Moon*, although a mere 28 and a half minutes, was his third and last album and arguably the best. His songs have a heartbreaking beauty along with a naked honesty. The starkness of the album has drawn frequent comparisons to the music of blues legend Robert Johnson, someone who Nick admired.

BOB DYLAN

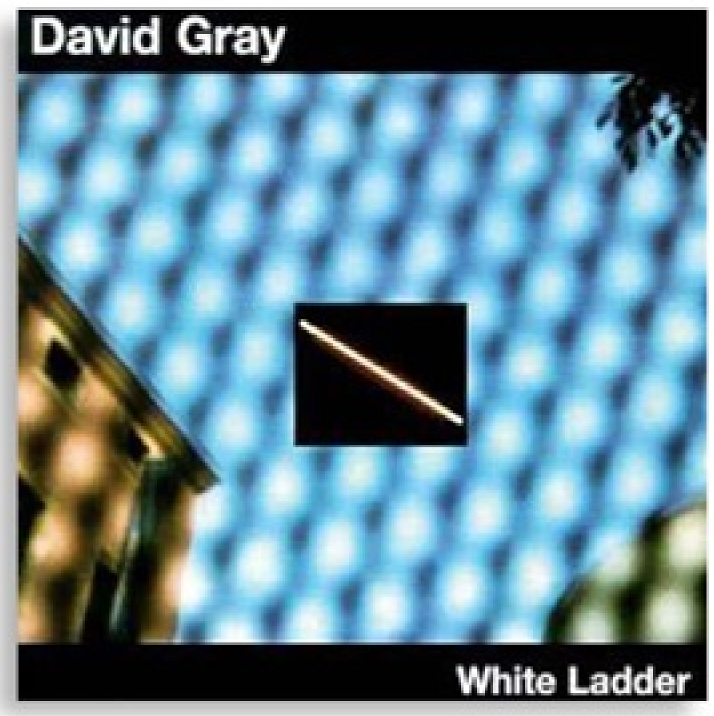
THE FREEWHEELIN' BOB DYLAN (1963)

10 This landmark album, featuring some of the 60s' most memorable songs, showed Dylan emerging as the most distinctive poetic voice in the history of American popular folk. Featuring 'Blowin' In The Wind', 'Masters Of War', 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall', 'Don't Think Twice, It's All Right', and 'I Shall Be Free', you could be forgiven for thinking of this as a greatest hits album. His inimitable guitar and harmonica playing show Dylan at his acoustic best and one of the most influential acoustic albums of all time.

JOSE FELICIANO

FELICIANO! (1968)

11 *Feliciano!* is an album of interpretations of mid 60s classics infused with Feliciano's languidly beautiful guitar playing and singing. The highlight is his version of The Doors' 'Light My Fire': in fact, for years, people assumed that The Doors had covered his version after the single went on to sell over a million records, making the singer a celebrity overnight. It also earned him two Grammy Awards. The album also included covers of songs by The Beatles and Bert Bacharach. A firm 'chillout' favourite around the world.



DAVID GRAY

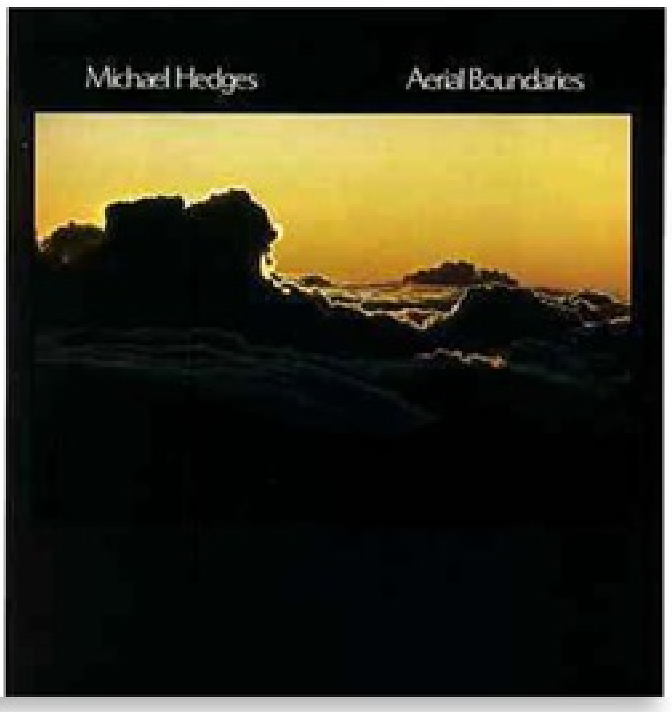
WHITE LADDER (1999)

12 Certified seven times platinum in the UK with sales of over 2 million accrued over more than 100 weeks in the Top 40. With his previous albums, Gray produced quality, folk-tinged songs with a raw yet melodic voice. However, for *White Ladder*, he adopted a more modern approach, adding beats and electronic sounds to the more traditional acoustic guitar and piano. Amazingly, Gray recorded *White Ladder* in his house. Amongst the standouts is 'Sail Away', which blends acoustic and electric sounds.

BEN HARPER

WELCOME TO THE CRUEL WORLD (1994)

13 It was Harper's devotion to vintage acoustic guitars that imbued this 1994 album with its sonic warmth. Very much in the Tracy Chapman mold, fans at the time saw him as a transcendent folk singer. His style of playing is best described as an unusual blend of calypso and Mississippi Delta blues. Political conviction may not have been hip in the 90s, but Harper excelled at it. Two such numbers, 'Like A King' and 'Take That Attitude To Your Grave' burn with conviction. 'Forever', a tender ballad, also demonstrates his emotional range.



MICHAEL HEDGES

AERIAL BOUNDARIES (1985)

14 Many rate *Aerial Boundaries* as Michael Hedges' best album as well as being one of the most ground-breaking albums in acoustic guitar history. It amply demonstrates how he opened a new chapter on steel-string guitar playing. By employing a number of unorthodox and radical techniques, Hedges has produced some moments of surprisingly beautiful music. The songs are haunting and the guitar playing sometimes almost trance-like. Simply put, *Aerial Boundaries* is one of the most important acoustic albums ever made – it doesn't sound like anything else recorded before it.

BERT JANSCH

BERT JANSCH (1965)

15 Bert Jansch's ground-breaking virtuoso acoustic guitar playing is in full evidence on this, his first solo album. His impressive list of admirers include Jimmy Page, Neil Young, Noel Gallagher, Bernard Butler and Johnny Marr. Jansch recorded the album on a borrowed guitar and with a tape recorder in his flat. It deservedly earned him praise at the time for his innovative technique and powerful songs. This album also has Jansch's biggest hit, the haunting 'Needle Of Death', written about a friend's heroin overdose. Without a doubt, Bert Jansch is British folk at its best.

LEO KOTTKE

6 AND 12 STRING GUITAR (1971)

16 Kottke is part of the rare breed of virtuoso composers who were able to break new ground for the acoustic while achieving popularity in their own lifetime. *6 And 12 String Guitar*, also often referred to as the armadillo album, demonstrated Kottke's strikingly original guitar style, a melting pot mix of genres. The album was praised for sounding vastly different from the work of other acoustic players. Kottke was clearly a master of inimitable steel-string, fingerstyle pieces and this album showcased his talents perfectly.

LED ZEPPELIN

LED ZEPPELIN III (1970)

17 By 1970, Led Zeppelin had already made a name for themselves as purveyors of massive riffs. So when this album, consisting mainly of acoustic material, was released it took the whole music world by surprise. Boasting tracks like 'Gallows Pole', a frenzied take on traditional folk, and two softer, more romantic tunes, 'Tangerine' and 'That's The Way', it proved there was more to Led Zeppelin than just pure power. The album has stood the test of time: incredible to think that it was seen as a disappointment by critics and fans alike.

LINDISFARNE

NICELY OUT OF TUNE (1970)

18 *Nicely Out Of Tune* is a platter full of Alan Hull's literate acoustic songs. Although probably best remembered for the shimmering hit single, 'Lady Eleanor', there are many other numbers of equal merit. Comparisons with Fairport Convention were not accurate, despite the use of mandolin, fiddle and harmonica alongside delicate acoustic picking and occasional electric guitar. In fact, it was hard to pin a tag on Lindisfarne as they quickly developed their own unique sound. Their ramshackle debut has become a classic.

JOHN MARTYN
SOLID AIR (1973)

19 Over the years, John Martyn has offered us an eclectic range of sounds and styles. Elements of jazz, blues, and rock are all in evidence, but folk is at the core of his sound. It's hard to pick a highlight on *Solid Air*: the whole album is a masterpiece. However, if only for sentimental reasons, 'Solid Air', a beautiful tribute to his depressed friend, Nick Drake. Another number, 'May You Never' was a favourite of Eric Clapton, who later covered it on his *Slowhand* album in 1977. One of the most original and satisfying folk albums ever made.

DON MCLEAN
AMERICAN PIE (1971)

20 McLean never enjoyed complicated, pretentious and non-melodic music. His inspiration is drawn from simple, beautiful songs. Mention his name and most people will instantly associate *American Pie* with him. A huge worldwide hit single, it was a brilliant song, a metaphor for the death and rebirth of rock that's as complex as it is instantaneously accessible. The album itself sold well on the strength of the title track and his other song, 'Vincent', and it remained in the charts for 48 weeks and went gold in 1972. One of the most famous folk albums of all time!

RALPH MCTELL
SPIRAL STAIRCASE (1969)

21 Like McLean, McTell is always associated with one major hit single. In his case it is 'Streets Of London', originally from his second album, *Spiral Staircase*. This low-key acoustic version is more sparse than the mid-70s re-recording that made it a huge success in UK charts. The album tone is largely acoustic, with occasional orchestral arrangements by Mike Vickers. As with several other folkies at the time, a smattering of blues is also present in the form of Robert Johnson's 'Kind Hearted Woman Blues', alongside a selection of hauntingly ethereal songs.

JONI MITCHELL
BLUE (1971)

22 Many regard *Blue* as Joni's best album, introducing the confessional singer-songwriter's original style to a mass audience. One of the many highlights is the eerie, doom-laden 'This Flight Tonight', later covered by heavy rockers, Nazareth. But, in truth, almost every song is a classic, especially 'The Last Time I Saw Richard', 'A Case Of You', and 'California'. The music alternates between acoustic guitar and piano arrangements. Stephen Stills and James Taylor are just some of the heavyweights playing in support.

NIRVANA
MTV UNPLUGGED (1994)

23 On *MTV Unplugged* Cobain and chums showed us their more vulnerable side. Even if you weren't ever a fan, forget everything you thought you knew about them and check this out. This is not 'Teen Spirit': it's a toned-down, relaxed Nirvana, and it works well. Several covers are on the album, the best of which is Leadbelly's 'Where Did You Sleep Last Night'. Up to then, Nirvana could simply have been a cultural phenomenon stuck in their time. This album showed the world that was not the case.

PAUL SIMON
PAUL SIMON (1972)

24 It must have been fairly nerve racking to follow the huge success of Simon & Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* with a solo venture. But Paul Simon's 1972 solo debut is a far more modest affair. It was recorded with an eclectic crew of players, including jazzmen Stéphane Grappelli, Jerry Hahn, and Ron Carter, and Simon offered up different musical palettes. The reggae-styled 'Mother And Child Reunion' and 'Me And Julio Down By The Schoolyard', two high points, have an up tempo charm, but there are many moods here.

SIMON & GARFUNKEL

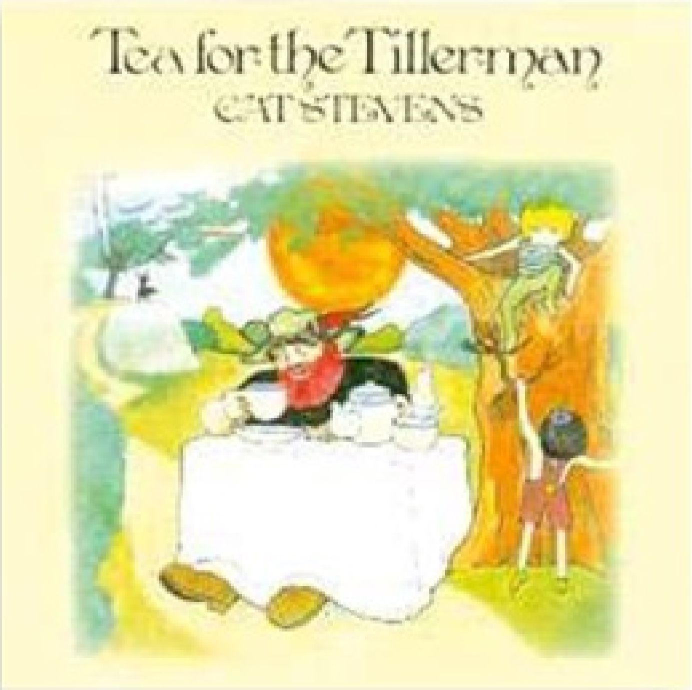
PARSLEY, SAGE, ROSEMARY & THYME (1966)

25 *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme* was Simon & Garfunkel's breakthrough album. Engineer Roy Halee ensured that the album sounded great: just compare the clumsy overdubbing of their earlier *The Sound Of Silence* with anything on this and you'll see what we mean! The highlight has to be the title song. It remains a beautiful signature piece, relying simply on acoustic guitar and harpsichord to convey its haunting marriage of English ballad and antiwar plaint. The album showers the listener in acoustic delicacy – a perfect blend of traditional and modern ideas.

ELLIOTT SMITH

EITHER/OR (1997)

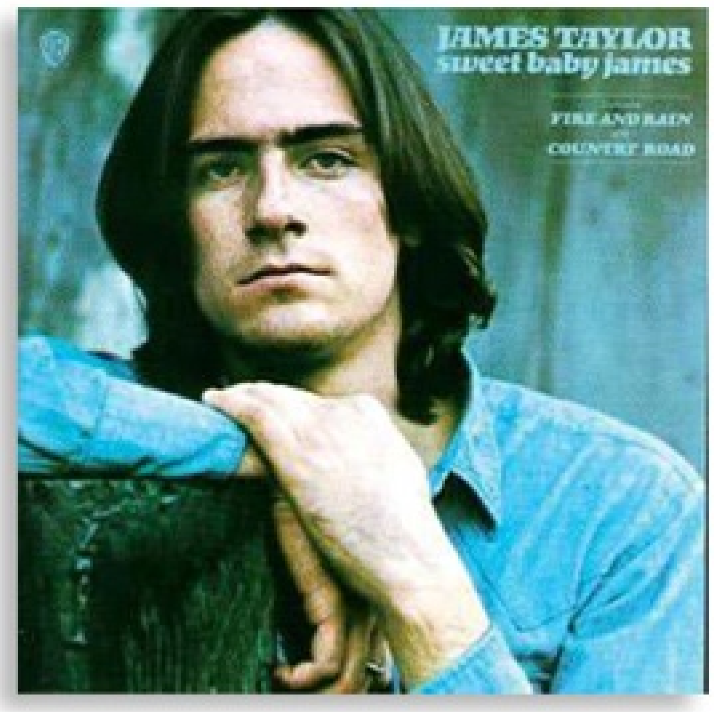
26 Elliott Smith was arguably the best alternative acoustic solo artist of the late 90s. Always wearing his influences on his sleeve, he mixed Beatlesque melodies with Arlo Guthrie fingerpicking and Nick Drake lyrics. On this album, his idiosyncratic guitar picking is well served by its low-fi production. The songs are full of subtle chord changes with haunting and frail vocals. In many ways, this can be seen as his 'perfect imperfect' album, before his production values became more hi-fi and his arrangements more expansive and melodically complex.



CAT STEVENS

TEA FOR THE TILLERMAN (1970)

27 Cat Stevens was always looking for some form of spirituality. He eventually found it in the form of Islam later in life. But way back in 1970, on *Tea For The Tillerman*, he wrote songs about living in the modern world while rejecting it in favour of spiritual fulfilment. Out of all the Brit folk-rockers, Cat was the most gifted tunesmith and 'Wild World' and 'Where Do The Children Play?' illustrate this perfectly. This is a sublime collection of beautiful songs that will enter your subconscious and stay there – a must for any album collection!



JAMES TAYLOR

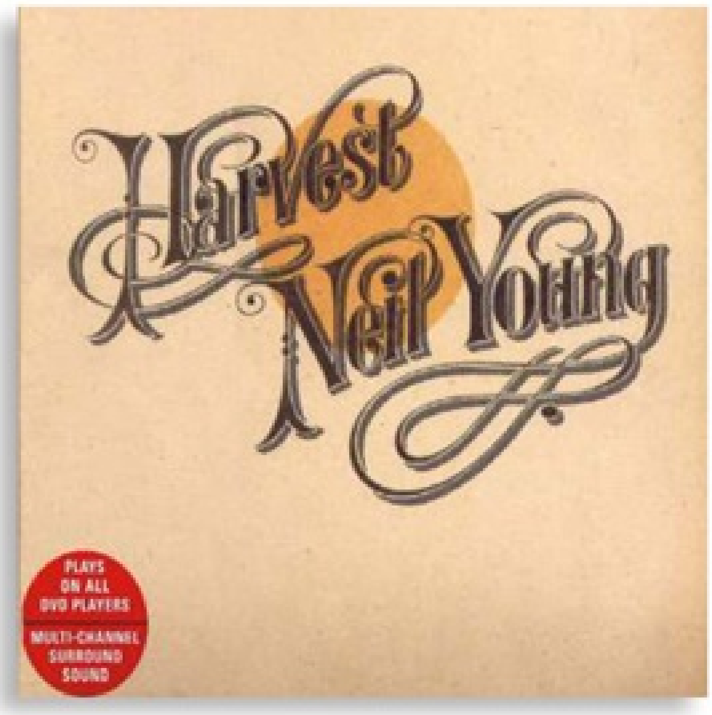
SWEET BABY JAMES (1970)

28 *Sweet Baby James* was Taylor's first album for Warners after a spell at Apple, the Beatles' label. The album's charm lies in the instruments used, acoustic guitar, piano, steel guitar, fiddle and a few brass arrangements. At times reminiscent of The Band, The Byrds and Dylan in his country phase, *Sweet Baby James* is regarded as the album that made Taylor a household name. The standout is 'Fire And Rain', inspired by his stay in a psychiatric ward and the suicide of a fellow patient, although this boasts many other gems.

VAN MORRISON

ASTRAL WEEKS (1968)

29 Released in 1968, *Astral Weeks* blended jazz, blues, folk and classical music ideas to make sounds quite unlike anything else at the time. Recorded in New York, with a team of seasoned jazz musicians and a string quartet, Van's vocal dexterity and passion oozes from every groove. Among highlights are 'Madame George', which captures the mixture of joy and sadness that comes with loss of innocence, and 'Cyprus Avenue', about unrequited, perhaps even forbidden love. An absolute masterpiece!



NEIL YOUNG

HARVEST (1972)

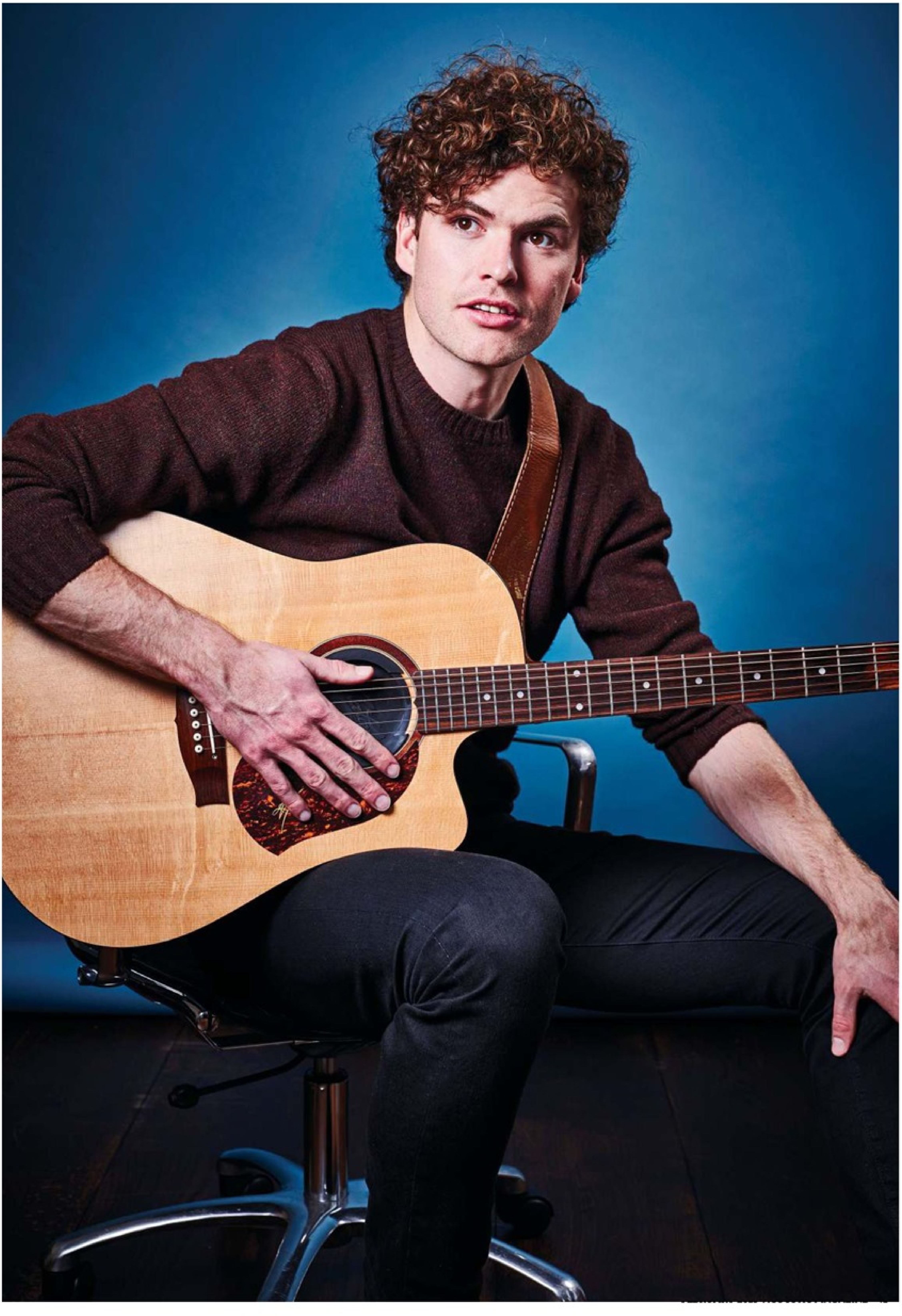
30 When Neil Young found himself in Nashville in 1971, he recorded some newly penned numbers with an impromptu band featuring bassist Tim Drummond, drummer Kenny Buttrey, and steel guitarist Ben Keith. Collectively, they called themselves The Stray Gators and they went on to record one of the best loved albums of his entire career, *Harvest*. A favourite to many is 'Old Man', a song about a young man pondering his own mortality. More than 20 years later, Young recorded a follow up, *Harvest Moon*.

VANCE JOY

The artist behind platinum selling 'Riptide' is still making waves with his unique, stripped-down playing. Emily Bielby caught up with the curly haired crooner

Australian-born James Keogh, better known as Vance Joy, sprung to success with the release of breakout track 'Riptide'. The 29-year-old's chilled, summery and upbeat indie folk pop is infused with the Australian music he grew up listening to.

In that vein, his new album *Nation Of Two* came together effortlessly with no direct theme or style set in stone; speaking with Joy over the phone, he admits that most of his songs started out as guitar riffs on his phone. "I knew that I needed to write songs because I wanted to release an album eventually and so I started collecting ideas along the way like when I was on tour; I might hear a line I like and write it down onto my phone or



GEARBOX

Kala ukulele with a shadow pickup

Gibson J-45 mahogany (limited edition) – we have two of these, main and spare, both are used during the set in E tuning

Martin HD-28 used primarily on two songs with a capo, in E tuning

Maton ESRS70C and ECW80C in D tuning, one for live shows, one a spare

"All of the songs I like came in through the side door, as opposed to me chasing them down"

write a little guitar riff that I like. I can store all that stuff but I guess the glue – the actual songs taking shape to the point where you're really proud of them – all kind of happens out of your control. The songs were more based on things I found interesting like guitar riffs and words that I like and then they all come together into a song. All the songs I really like from this bunch are ones that came from me not trying too hard. They just came in through the side door as opposed to me chasing them down," says Joy.

The sophomore album, due for release in February, describes a perfectly self-contained couple: honest, heartfelt lyrics, sweet harmonies and a more than generous amount of solemn acoustic moments see the Melbourne singer-songwriter do folksy-pop at its finest. The album's preview singles, 'Lay It On Me', a very sultry and sweet brassy acoustic pop track that details instant attraction to somebody and folky ballad 'Like Gold', a straightforward breakup track with a very wistful persona sees Joy reminiscing on a past relationship. 'Take Your Time' ups the tempo slightly for a much more sunshiney vibe, whereas 'Call If You Need Me' returns to slower, more intricate rhythms, with gentle percussion, similar to that of 'Like Gold' – more on that later.

Lyrically *Nation Of Two* is deep and very thought provoking, but inspiration-wise Joy likes to mix things up, gathering ideas from film imagery, books, or experiences that happen to someone other than himself, as well as his own personal experiences. "There are a couple of songs on there that I feel are a bit more personal. I probably always inject bits of myself into my songs, but there is one song in particular where I wrote something that felt particularly autobiographical for the first time. I've never experienced that working, but with 'Little Boy' it worked out well. It's nice to think you can actually turn your experiences into songs. It's funny how someone might describe a memory to you that didn't happen to you but for some reason you can just sing it and it feels right in the song," admits Joy.

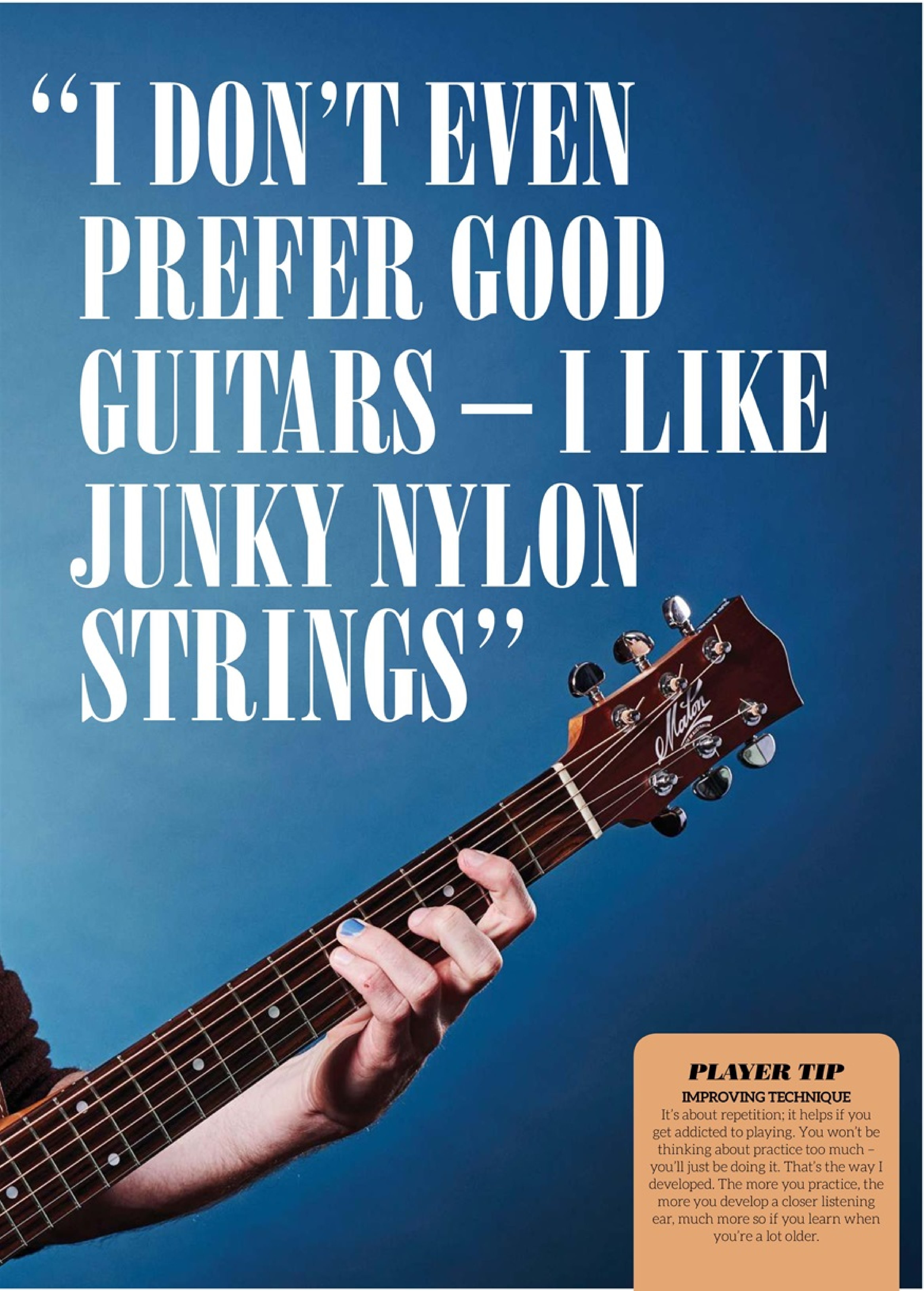
The new record showcases Joy's ability to let his simplistic fingerpicking and delicately plucked chords take the limelight, as bold and crisp rhythms bounce around effortlessly but effectively. His choices, it seems, were inspired by practicality as much as anything else. "If you're lazy like me, transporting guitars is a bit of a bother. So I was looking in Nashville for something compact to take around and record voice memos on my phone with. I got this Yamaha GL1 Guitalele which was only $120. It's just a mini guitar but it sounds really sweet. At least four songs on the album have been done using that as the main guitar. It has lovely character, even though it's cheap; the tuning's not too bad actually and I can fit it in my suitcase. So that was a good little discovery to change things up a bit.

"I also used a Seagull Merlin spruce SG dulcimer which was another cheap funky thing I picked up just for fun to play. Again, I actually wrote a song on it for the album, 'Where We Start'. It has three strings but it sounds like a banjo dulcimer. You always hear that saying, that a new guitar or a new instrument will always have a song in it and that was a true case with those two instruments I picked up.

"I also used a Custom Gibson, which looks like a really old one, but it's one of their new ones and it's black, it's one that I got recently and my guitar tech named it Janet. Not very descriptive of the actual guitar but it has a name which is important. I just watched *Blade Runner* and the replicants in that film didn't get names, they just got barcodes, so it probably means a lot to have a name," Joy says with a chuckle.

Being a loyal fan to Maton, it's no surprise to learn that Joy's Maton was also used on his new record, specifically the one that his dad bought for him in 2007. "The Maton I used on this record was the first good quality guitar my dad got me and it cost about $1,000. I played that first Maton guitar a lot and for the first few years of touring that was my main guitar; but it's been retired a little bit recently. All the guys in my band really like the sound

"I DON'T EVEN PREFER GOOD GUITARS – I LIKE JUNKY NYLON STRINGS"



PLAYER TIP

IMPROVING TECHNIQUE

It's about repetition; it helps if you get addicted to playing. You won't be thinking about practice too much – you'll just be doing it. That's the way I developed. The more you practice, the more you develop a closer listening ear, much more so if you learn when you're a lot older.

of that guitar so we kind of warm up with it in the backstage area," admits Joy. Although his Maton was used on the new record, Joy confesses he doesn't have a specific go-to guitar for songwriting, having not written that many songs on it, and instead prefers using less notable guitars. "I don't even prefer to use good guitars – I like junky nylon strings that I've found and written loads of songs on. On a song from my first album called 'Georgia', most of the breakthrough moments happened using less 'significant' guitars. Ones that have just been thrown around and treated pretty poorly, lying around the house; the ones that I tour with are kind of kept in storage a little bit and they're just used on tour."

In that respect, Joy isn't too fussy when it comes to guitar brands. "It really is just based on instinct and also when I'm choosing a guitar to play for the show it has to look cool as well. I take a lot of lead from my sound and monitor guys. I might play a guitar that doesn't sound good when it's amplified – like my Guitalele which is pretty cheap – but when it's mic'd up in the right way with the right equipment, it can sound really cool. This Guitalele was used on a song called 'Call If You Need Me' which was produced by Ryan Hadlock and he mic'd it up with a vintage mic to make like a really old school sound. He actually did the first couple of Johnny Flynn albums. He made this Guitalele sound like you were listening to something from the olden days and I just loved what he did."

Understandably, the 2012 Kala ukulele that Joy used to record 'Riptide' has sentimental value, but there's also a guitar his father bought as a teen that holds a special place in his heart. "He's almost 60 now so it's around 40 years' old," Joy explains, "but I don't take that on tour at all, it's a Suzuki which is Japanese – a Martin Dreadnought copy. It's super cool. The neck at the top, at first position is super thin and the action is really low. When you're learning guitar, you play, say, a nylon string with six strings and it breaks your hand – but then you play a guitar like this Suzuki with this thin neck and you barely have to hold the strings down. Just a really nice guitar."

Joy admits that he didn't immediately take to lessons, aged 11. "My motivation came when I was about 14 and I saw a couple of friends who were really good. They played the intro to Red Hot Chili Peppers' 'Under The Bridge' and Metallica's 'Nothing Else Matters' – which every 14 year old boy wanted to play and I did. Piece by piece I just started practicing more.

"Eventually I got hooked and I did lessons for about three years which I enjoyed because I had a really good teacher. He was the type who'd call me out for not practicing if I hadn't, so I always practiced."

For anyone new to Joy's guitar style, he's particularly well known for his raw, almost stripped-bare approach with precise plucking and fervent fingerpicking. "I fingerpick and strum and often the strumming is with my

PLAYER TIP

BEGINNING YOUR JOURNEY

Just get something fairly cheap and easy to handle, and someone to show you a few things, a few simple songs or power chords in front of you. If you see someone play, for example, 'Classical Gas', you're thinking it's impossible but you want to be able to play it. Having someone there guiding you through the early stages helps a lot.

fingers even though it sounds better when you use a pick. Although most of my songs have a combination of the two – and I play probably two or three rhythms in the fingerpicking and with this new record – there's a couple of songs where I've used different rhythms. The two songs 'Like Gold' and 'Call If You Need Me' have exactly the same rhythm but different tunes and I haven't played that rhythm before on songs," he explains. "My fingerpicking is very much inspired by Johnny Flynn who does a lot of fingerpicking hammer-ons and pull-offs really well."

Although his influences are vastly varied, he's got a bit of a weakness for a decent frontman. "There's a singer-songwriter called Paul Kelly who I really like – he's an Australian – and I really like Brandon Flowers from The Killers, just because he's got such a clear and powerful voice and it's uplifting. I just love some of The Killers' songs and I love that kind of going-for-it vocal. Paul Kelly has a really unique voice but the sound that I really envy is Flower's; people who can hit the really high notes, super clean, I love that," says Joy.

"My teacher was the type who'd call me out for not practicing if I hadn't, so I did"

As our chat moves to favourite songs ('Classical Gas' being at the top of his list), like a 14-year-old given a guitar for the first time, he eagerly picks up his guitar to show me his progress over the phone. "The main bit I can play, but I can't play the chorus, so if I could play that whole song, that would be the one."

Joy takes an endearing pride in how far he has come since his teens. "When I was 14, we were playing Blink 182's 'All The Small Things' for a little recital. My teacher played the melody and I played the chords; he said I played with authority with my rhythm. I felt really good about that; that even if my timing isn't always perfect, it's gotten heaps better since I started. That's something I feel that I have brought to my playing; rhythm and authority to the way I strum." ■

***Nation Of Two* is out now.**
Info: www.vancejoy.com

INSIDE COLLECTION
PAUL BRETT

For our monthly gander around Paul's famous collection, we explore decals, plus the historic blues guitars that influenced the influencers

1 REGAL

The Schmidt factory, like many others at the time including that of Regal produced guitars that were adorned with decals. I have several with these colourful motifs on them. Most Stella bodies were of slab-sawn birch construction and poplar necks. Some had floating bridges with a fret wire saddle, which aided slide playing tonally and a simple metal tailpiece. The decals were probably added to make them more visibly attractive on the shop floor to potential customers. Regal also tried decal designs using higher grade woods and some have 'faux' MOP fingerboards and headstocks. One of the Regals I have from the 30s has these appointments and also scroll-designed decals on the table. It plays well and throws out the deep, woody sound that was so typical of guitars from that era.

2 THE HARMONY 'REDBIRD'

In the late 30s, Harmony took over the Oscar Schmidt brands and continued producing inexpensive acoustics, including 12-strings. Unfortunately, they never quite reached the dizzy heights of the 30s iconic ones but they were not that bad. In fact, they are still fairly cheap to buy and as these things go, historically, they too may become collectable in the not too distant future, just like the electrics that Harmony made in the 60s, which have rocketed in price recently. In fact, the Harmony-made acoustics from the 30s are far more sought after by collectors than the later ones. I've had quite a few Harmony-made guitars and associated brands over the years, and one of my favourites from the 30s is what I call a Harmony Redbird. It's adorned with Birds of Paradise decals and plays great. I've never seen another with these motifs and the construction and materials used are of a high grade.

3 STROMBERG VOISINET

On the subject of guitars from that era with decals, Stromberg Voisinet, a Chicago-based company, also made inexpensive guitars and some of them had the odd quirky design. For example, some have closed back headstocks which do not make restringing an easy task and their decals had a leaning towards Hawaiian designs. They are quite rare these days: some have mother of plastic fingerboards and like Stellas, were ladder-braced, which gives them a bright and woody tone. Like many guitars of that ilk, they were suited to slide playing.

WILLIE MCTELL STELLA WESTBROOK 12-STRING

The influence of idols and influence on guitar choices has, of course, always been a major talking point for bluesmen. One point that always amazes me is the comparison between the early ladder-braced guitars and later X-braced and more modern ones. I've heard it said on more than one occasion that ladder-braced guitars do not stand the test of time. It is an opinion that may not live up to the facts, just more of a personal preference.

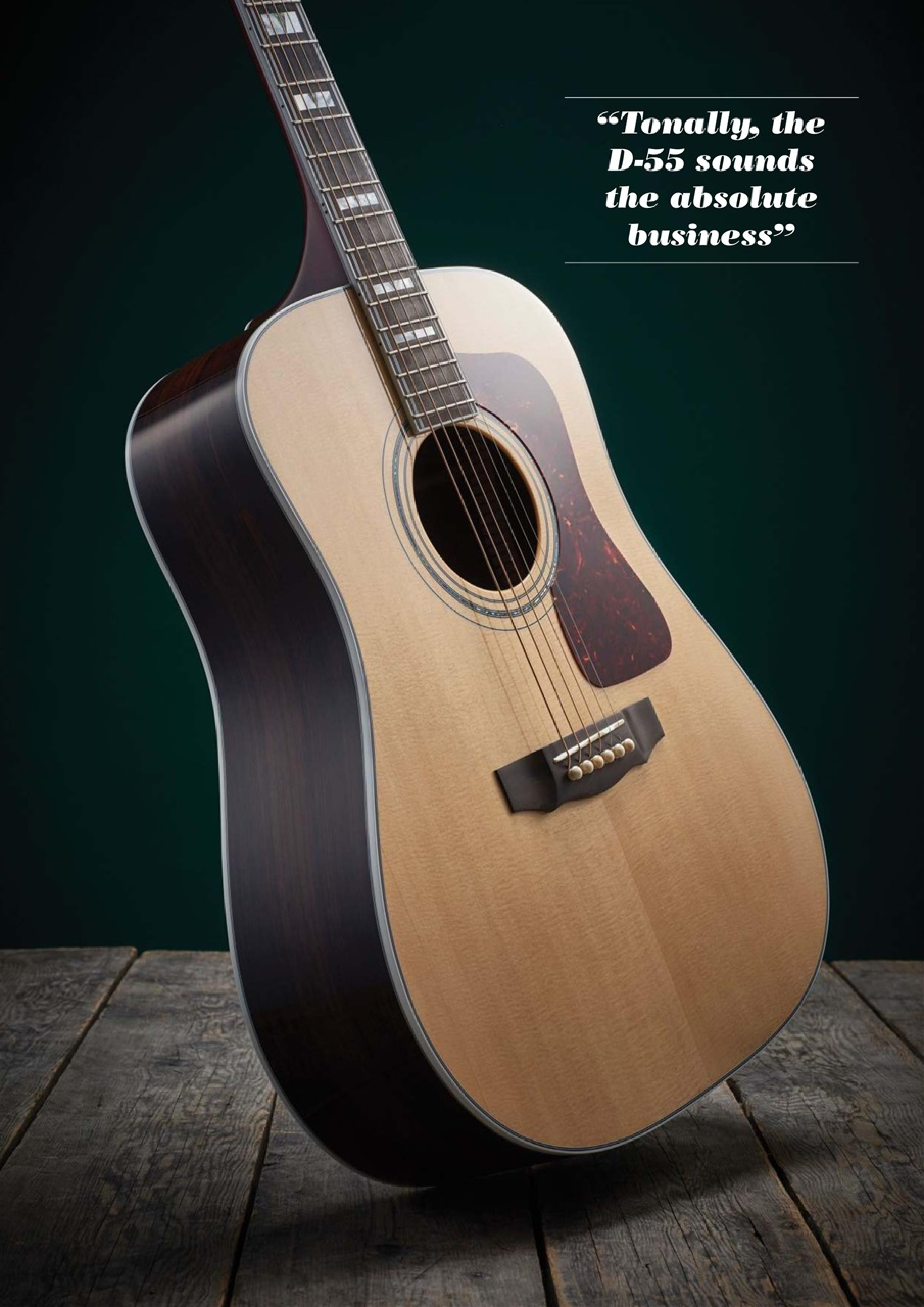
Ladder-braced guitars have been around longer than the other configurations and they certainly bear evidence of solid survival, especially if you look at the 'working man's guitars' made by the Oscar Schmidt Company. Most survived very well through the Great Depression of the 1920s, World Wars 1 and 2 and way beyond. Some even have their original paper brand labels inside! Quite a few have found their way into my collection over the years and the vast majority of blues pioneers played Stellas from the Schmidt factory. Part of the reason for their popularity among bluesmen was the fact they were cheap and available in general stores outside of the major cities. Most early players in this genre were extremely poor and thus couldn't afford the more expensive brands.

"Most early players couldn't afford more expensive brands"

The main wood used in the manufacturing of Stellas was generally birch. Other woods were used on some models – Sovereigns for example – but these were slightly more expensive. It is certainly a historical and well-documented fact that the list of Stella users in the blues genre far outweighed any other brand at that time. Apart from the six-strings, the most sought after and collectable of the early Stellas has to be their 12-strings. This is mainly due to their usage by one or two musicians, notably Huddie Ledbetter, aka Leadbelly, and Blind Willie McTell. The former is probably the best known of the two, although not quite as proficient a player as the latter. Leadbelly's songs have transcended his lifetime, having been covered by many artistes over the ages. In fact, it was Lonnie Donegan who popularised Leadbelly's songs here in the UK by recording many in his skiffle/pop style and having huge chart hits with them. I had the pleasure of playing lead guitar in Lonnie's group and we both had a great love of Leadbelly's songs. Leadbelly was also more of a folk singer than Willie McTell, whose syncopated ragtime fingerstyle playing that accompanied his traditional blues vocal style was definitely blues in style. The two legends played Stella 12-strings throughout their careers and it is these guitars that are the most collectable and expensive of the old Stella range. I have a big Leadbelly style Schmidt 12-string from the 1930s and a Willie McTell Stella Westbrook from 1938. The former has a traditional slotted headstock and the latter a solid one. Of the two, the Westbrook is by far the rarer, with only one or maybe two in existence that I know of. They are also different in size, construction and sound.

There is a PS to the McTell Stella insofar that myself and Vintage morphed a tribute to the guitar and the man, by releasing an updated version of the Westbrook recently, aptly named The Statesboro' after Willie's classic song 'Statesboro' Blues'. It was a great pleasure to pay tribute to one of the great blues 12-string players in this way.

VIDEO EXTRA!
For video demos of all of this issue's featured guitars, and many more, visit: www.youtube.com/user/guitbrett



"Tonally, the D-55 sounds the absolute business"

GUILD D-55

Alun Lower takes a trip across the pond to check out this high-end Americana guitar

When you think of the most iconic acoustic guitars that have ever been played, chances are that most people would name-drop one of the obvious contenders from the likes of Martin or even Gibson. Real American icons that have stood the test of time and provided the sounding board for some of the greatest tunes ever penned on a six-string. One such guitar that perhaps doesn't get the recognition it deserves, though, in some circles is Guild's D-55, the company's flagship dreadnought, beloved by the likes of Tommy Smothers, Waylon Jennings, Billy Joe Armstrong and David Nail, to quote Guild's own website.

Truly, the humble dread has proved so many times to have been the backbone of modern music across a multitude of genres, and the D-55 is Guild's ultimate vision of that iconic design. Packing in high quality tonewoods, expert craftsmanship and carefully chosen luxury appointments, the D-55 is bound to make an enticing prospect for any fan of the slope-shouldered strummer.

BUILD QUALITY

It really seems as though Guild has gone all-out with every possible element of the D-55. For starters, the supplied hardcase comes wrapped in a gaudy, but oh-so-American faux alligator skin. Once inside, a humidifier is revealed in the top section, while the D-55 sits snugly in luxurious green, velvety padding.

As for the guitar itself, the tonewood combination is the classic mix of a AAA-grade Sitka spruce top partnered with Indian rosewood back and sides, while internally the guitar features scalloped Adirondack spruce bracing. The body connects to a mahogany neck via an improved dovetail joint, and also manages to sneak in a strip of walnut up the length of the mahogany. On the reverse of the neck is a uniformly dark ebony fingerboard topped with 20 frets. While we're there, I have to pause for a moment to mention that the frets are the only part of the D-55's construction that I can objectively criticise. While there are no sharp edges or anything like that, I did personally find the frets slightly scratchy in use. Not overly so, but for my money it's still a rather considerable setback on a guitar that commands such a high price. I've played cheaper guitars with better fret polishing this year, and that just shouldn't be the case at this level. Hopefully it's something that is isolated to this one example, but I've got to note it down regardless.

Leaving that issue to one side, much can also be said about the visual aesthetics of the guitar. The nitrocellulose gloss finish is perfectly smooth and expertly applied across the entirety of the body and neck. The golden Gotoh open gear tuners and inlay work on the headstock and fingerboard is far from subtle, but there's no denying that there's a real Gibson-esque American charm to it all – if you're a fan of the look then you'll be very well catered for here as the quality of the workmanship is sublime. The binding is very smart too, offering a crisp, pinstripe black and white outline over every curve and edge you can find. There's also a lovely woodwork embellishment working its way up the middle of the rosewood back.

There aren't any electronics included on the example I received for review, but the option exists for fitting an LR Baggs Anthem if you're so inclined, and yes, that'll cost you extra.

Overall, fret finishing issues aside, I can't help but be impressed by the detail and workmanship that has gone into the D-55. If you're a fan of decorative, American-made acoustics then there's plenty to love here and you'll enjoy admiring all those little touches every time you pick up the guitar. It

might not be the ideal look for minimalists, admittedly, but there's plenty of choices elsewhere for that style of instrument.

SOUND QUALITY

Dreadnoughts have a reputation for being keen strummers and all-rounders, and the D-55 fits the bill here as well as any dread I've ever been fortunate enough to play. From the first note you can really hear the character of the woods shining through in a way that'll immediately transport you to your favourite ever songs. The tone is as clear and balanced as you like, with the rosewood adding a beautifully defined bass

GUILD D-55

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Guild
Model: D-55
RRP: £3,749
Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: USA
Top: Solid Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Solid Indian rosewood
Max Rim Depth: 5" (127mm)
Max Body Width: 16" (406.4mm)
Neck: Mahogany with walnut centre strip
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Bridge: Ebony
Nut Width: 1.7" (43mm)
Scale Length: 25" (650.9mm)
Weight: 5.07lbs (2.3kg)
Onboard Electrics: N/A (LR Baggs Anthem option available)
Controls: N/A (LR Baggs Anthem features volume and tone controls)
Tuners: Gold Gotoh SE700 open gear
Finishes Available: Natural Antique Sunburst
Gig Bag/Case Included: Yes

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build quality: ★★★★☆
Sound quality: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★☆

ACOUSTIC RATING

Pros: Gorgeous tones and iconic, eye-catching looks
Cons: Neck isn't for everyone, some fret finishing issues, very expensive
Overall: A genuine guitar icon: as rewarding to play now as it's ever been

CONTACT DETAILS

www.guildguitars.com

response to the sparkling, harmonic-rich highs of that high quality Sitka spruce. For all the definition and detail to the voice, it never sounds sterile – there's real character to the tones that offer plenty of sustain, projection and volume when played hard, but the subtlety is also there for when you need to quiet things down and get a little bit more soulful.

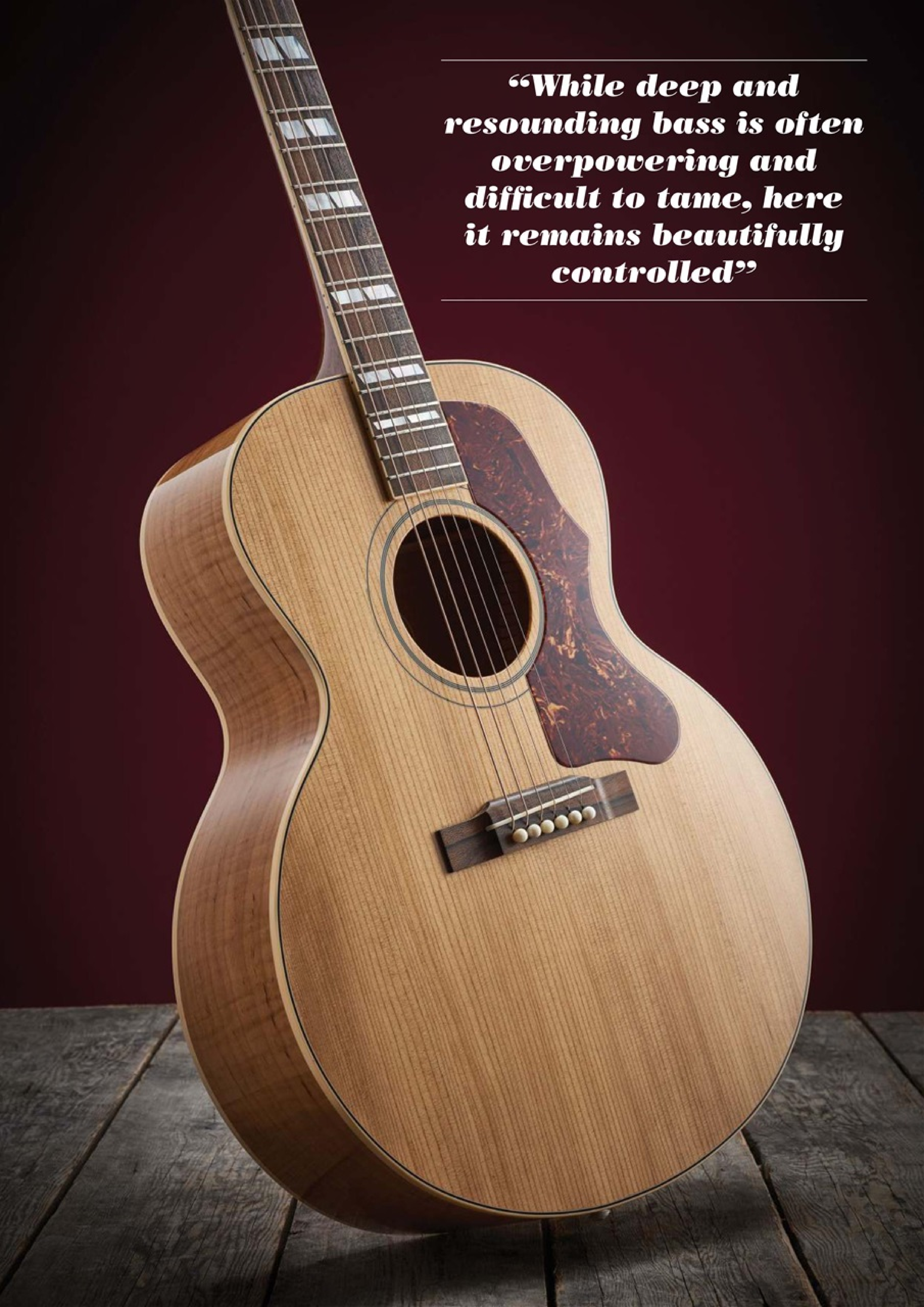
With that in mind, it's also worth mentioning that the D-55 also makes a good fingerpicker, with a certain plumminess to the lower strings under the thumb that makes it ideal for bass lines, while your other fingers coax out more of those delightful highs from the upper strings. The neck profile is rather flat though, so depending on your preferences you might feel that the area around the nut (which sports a 43mm spacing, for reference) feels a little restrictive at times. That's subjective though, so for the time being let's just say that tonally, the D-55 sounds the absolute business.

"Balanced, powerful... and utterly infectious"

CONCLUSION

There's no denying that the D-55 is a superb guitar, and Guild should rightly be commended for the superb craftsmanship on display. Tonally, the guitar is the quintessential dreadnought – balanced, powerful, versatile and utterly infectious. The kind of guitar you can easily lose hours and hours of playtime to without so much as a second thought.

However, the issue with my example's fret finishing does mean I can't quite give a perfect score. Sometimes it's a criticism you can ignore in the face of a guitar's strengths, but the deciding factor against that approach here is the price tag. Whatever way you swing it, this is an expensive guitar, and anyone spending this much money should expect perfection. I haven't *quite* experienced that here, and for that reason I'd suggest anyone out there that has fallen for the Guild's obvious charms try it for themselves. If it's the instrument for you, I suspect you'll know very quickly, and that you'll have a very difficult time putting it back down. ■



“While deep and resounding bass is often overpowering and difficult to tame, here it remains beautifully controlled”

FAIRBANKS F-40

Guitars from Dale Fairbanks have been getting some very favourable attention of late. But will the hype outweigh the truth? Dan Hobson finds out...

Dale Fairbanks is a rising star in the world of guitar building. Living and working in his own one-man shop in Connecticut, USA, his work is inspired by the great vintage designs of the 1920s, 30s and 40s. Dale specialises in painstakingly crafted replicas of Gibson, Larson Brothers, Oscar Schmidt, and Regal models, drawing upon his years of experience as a specialist repairman. He mission is to take the early designs from the Golden Age of the American guitar and make them as good – if not better – than the old designs.

According to the North American Guitar Company, who have been kind enough to provide us with this review model today, "A Fairbanks guitar feels like an instrument that is already the best part of 100 years old. His guitars are extremely light, resonant and his finish work is superb."

In Dale's own words: "I strive to reproduce the visual and aural mojo that these instruments have in spades, using traditional tonewoods and construction techniques — and, occasionally, the downright weird and always cool stylistic details that set these guitars apart."

While the self-taught luthier is a relative new kid on the block, he is fast making a name for himself as an extraordinary guitar builder. We're definitely intrigued. But will the expectation outweigh the truth? There's only one way to find out...

BUILD QUALITY

Modelled upon a Gibson J-185, the F-40 features a torrefied red spruce top, paired with torrefied maple back and sides which produces a clarity that is hard to find on models of this size. The dovetail-joined neck combines Honduran mahogany with a ziricote fingerboard accented by MOP parallelogram fingerboard inlay.

All the materials used for this guitar are top-of-the-range and the timber is enhanced by a nitrocellulose-over-shellac finish. Before we've strummed a single note we're in awe. It certainly is a stunner!

However, the first thing that struck us upon opening the case is the guitar's divine aroma. Like a Florentine furniture store; the scent of timber and wood glue screams style and quality. While smell has no bearing

on sound or playability of the instrument, it is definitely part of the enjoyment with tonewoods such as this.

This intimate encounter with the F-40's internal body parts reveals an extremely high build standard indeed. While the vintage Gibsons were never obsessively immaculate, the F-40 truly is a work of art on the inside, as well as on the outside. The back braces are some of the most delicate we have ever seen. All four are barely a quarter of an inch wide, and they have been carved tall and thin; tapering gracefully as they tuck under the kerfing, making the back of the guitar extremely resonant. In fact, so resonant is it that when you tap the back of the guitar it is akin to tapping a drum skin.

The top braces are also carved with great finesse and the intersection of the X-braces is some of the neatest we have ever encountered. This time and attention to detail is well worth it when it comes to the tone of the guitar too, as we'll discover.

The F-40 does indeed look every bit like the vintage classic. That said, there are a few modernities. Fairbanks has incorporated a two-way truss rod into the neck, which is described as having a 'modern C' profile. The neck has noticeably less depth than those from the 20s or 30s, though, yet retains a full roundness that feels more like something from the 50s.

Overall, it's difficult to find a single thing to fault about the build of the guitar. Every detail is crafted to absolute perfection. While this is no suprise for a guitar of this price, it's remarkable all the same.

SOUND QUALITY

The F-40 is truly a powerhouse guitar that begs to be throttled with a pick, yet has gorgeous, woody tone when played with fingers. A consummate all-rounder, it responds obediently to any playing style that is thrown at it. Its presence ensures the clarity and articulation you need for fingerpicking, while its gutsy output and decent headroom mean it can indeed blow your head off (should you so wish).

That said, while deep and resounding bass can often be overpowering and difficult to tame, here it remains beautifully controlled. Rich, hearty, wood-toned mid-range provides the kind of mellow power that fills a room and drives everything along without ever sounding too raucous. This is a quality that all really great acoustics possess.

Overall, the sound is majestic and the

tones are extremely balanced; each end of the tonal spectrum seems to have its own proportionate, correct weight.

The F-40 is a very easy guitar to play in standard as well as open tunings. The bass end remains commendably defined and the plain strings are never overpowered.

Due to the torrefication process, the F-40 definitely has the sound of a vintage instrument. However, no scientific process can fully replicate 80 years of life experience and wear, so, as you'd expect, this instrument is still a little fresh sounding at the time of the review.

FAIRBANKS F-40

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Fairbanks
Model: F-40
RRP: £5,750
Body Size: Jumbo
Made In: USA
Top: Torrefied red spruce
Back and Sides: Torrefied maple
Max Rim Depth: 4.5" (114.3mm)
Max Body Width: 16" (406.4m)
Neck: Honduran mahogany
Fingerboard: Ziricote
Bridge: Ziricote
Nut Width: 1.75" (44.45mm)
Scale Length: 24.74" (628.7mm)
Weight: 5lbs (2.27kg)
Onboard Electrics: No
Tuners: Waverly
Left Hand Option: Yes
Finishes Available: Natural and Sunburst
Gig Bag/Case Included: Guardian hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Flawless build quality, exceptional tone, and a breathtaking sound
Cons: Not a single thing to fault about the instrument. Too expensive for most people,
Overall: A fine example of guitar building at its best

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★★
Sound Quality: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS

thenorthamericanguitar.com

To be clear, however, that is 'fresh sounding' as compared to the The North American Guitar Company's bold statement that Fairbanks guitars sound 100 years old. As the years progress, I would love to hear how this already-magical tone develops.

CONCLUSION

OK, so at this price, the Fairbanks F-40 will not be for everybody. And while we do aim to review 'affordable' guitars in this magazine – typically priced between £200-£2,000 – it is impossible to ignore such a fine example of guitar building. It really is a joy to see, hear, play and write about a guitar of this stature. The build quality, as well as the precision and depth of the F-40's tone, are second to none. By no means a mere vintage clone, it sounds spectacular right now. One can only imagine what this beauty is going to sound like after 30 years of solid playing on it.

> **"One can only guess what this beauty is going to sound like after 30 years of solid playing on it"**

For anyone prepared to pay £5,750 for a guitar, you would, of course, expect a faultless instrument. And the craftsmanship that has gone into this instrument is truly breathtaking. If Mr Fairbanks offered to give this F-40 away free of charge to any person that could find a gripe with the build, I would be confident he'd be holding onto it. You could look at this guitar for hours and not find a single thing to fault. Every angle, part and detail is executed with the kind of meticulous precision rarely seen in guitar-making at any level. Absolutely impeccable. If you're packing for something in this price range, I'd definitely check Mr Fairbanks out. ■

EPIPHONE MASTERBILT CENTURY ZENITH

Why play flat when you can go arch? Joel McIver digs into Epiphone's new Masterbilt archtop

Ah, the old question. Is an acoustic guitar that you can amplify truly an acoustic, or is it an electric, or even an electro-acoustic? Even Epiphone, the makers of the guitar that stands before us, appear not to know for sure, describing the Masterbilt Century Zenith as an "acoustic/electric" guitar (their double quotes and slash). So if they don't know, given that their archtop range first gained popularity in the 1930s (ask your great-grandfather), the rest of us will simply have to admit our ignorance – and conclude that it's just a guitar that works unplugged or otherwise.

The main selling point with this Zenith is that it's an archtop guitar, rather than a flat-top design like the ones found elsewhere in this magazine. Note the two-piece bridge, the 'floating' top end of the neck and of course the two F holes, all of which make it obvious that this is no ordinary strummer.

It's a beauty, all right; for your £679 you get a fantastic spruce-topped maple body in natural or burst finishes, plus super-solid hardware and details that ooze class. Look more carefully and you'll even see a certificate peeping out behind the top F hole – so how does it perform when you pick up, plug and play?

BUILD QUALITY

Rightly or wrongly, in this retro-focused world, it makes sound commercial sense to look backwards when it comes to instrument design. The new Zenith has been designed to resemble the original ancient Epiphone archtops, with a lower bout of 16", an upper bout of 11.5" and a waist of 9.4". If these measurements seem meaningless, that's fine; let's just say the guitar has a large frame, offset for comfort. According to Epiphone, archtop purists regard these numbers as ideal when it comes to sound and volume, which is good enough for us.

Nostalgic the design may be, but the engineering and construction has all the hallmarks of modernity. Made in the Gibson and Epiphone factory in Qingdao, China, the Zenith has an ebony fingerboard – the real thing, rather than a eco-friendly synthetic version, so if real wood is your thing, look no further. Bound with a single layer of ivory binding for a trad look, the neck complements the body, also bound in ivory and black. These components are micromillimetrically tight, as they should be at this midmarket price point.

> **"This is a beast that wants to fight back"**

Moving down the five-piece maple and mahogany neck and checking for sharp fret ends (there's not a finger-slicer in sight), we encounter a dovetailed set neck which feels completely secure – an important consideration given the amply-nourished dimensions of the instrument. There are 20 frets, 14 of them accessible outside the body, and a wholly manageable 25.5" scale to contend with. The inlays look vintage, which they should do as they're modelled after the original range – that retro ethic kicking in again...

The guitar comes with an optional pickguard and hardware to attach it; you may wonder what the shark-fin-shaped thing clattering around inside the box is, until you discover this fact. You may require it to prevent body damage if you're a hard hitter, but for aesthetic reasons alone we left it off during our review. This is largely because the body top is already crowded enough, with those F holes and that amazing two-piece bridge. The latter, an adjustable unit via two thumbwheels, looks delicate; let's hope it's robust enough to survive the trials and tribulations of gigging.

The overall impression is of a big guitar, topped off with a solid headstock and balancing well seated or on a strap, with a weight that is not too much to handle and user-friendly dimensions. The details are all in place, with the battery compartment integrated usefully into the input socket; heavy tuners whose stiff operation implies decent quality; and hardware that seems designed with the user's practical needs in mind. There's a pickup under the bridge, as well as a preamp – complete with volume and EQ inside the guitar – lurking somewhere, so let's see how the Zenith performs with some voltage up it.

SOUND QUALITY

Unamplified, the Zenith is loud enough for small (very small) performances, but it really

comes into its own when plugged in. This is for several reasons. Firstly, the natural sound isn't exactly warm: the low end is big enough, for sure, but there's a combination of mids and top end which conspire to make the sound – to these ears at least – a little hollow and jagged for comfort.

EPIPHONE MASTERBILT CENTURY ZENITH

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Epiphone
Model: Masterbilt Century Zenith
RRP: £679
Body Size: Medium
Made In: China
Top: Spruce
Back and Sides: Maple
Max Rim Depth: 3.5" (90mm)
Max Body Width: 15.7"(400mm)
Neck: Five-piece laminated maple and mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Bridge: Ebonoid, floating adjustable, with trapeze tailpiece
Nut Width: 1.7" (43mm)
Scale Length: 25.5" (647.7mm)
Weight: 5.5lb (2.45kg)
Onboard Electrics: Shadow NanoFlex HD under-saddle pickup, eSonic HD preamp
Controls: Volume, tone
Tuners: Epiphone Reissue tuners with Marboloid 'Crown' buttons, 18:1 ratio
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Sunburst or natural
Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Excellent build quality; decent electronics
Cons: Tones will be a little harsh for some players
Overall: Interesting, cost-effective archtop; investigate if you're after something different

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★☆
Sound Quality: ★★★½☆
Overall: ★★★★☆

CONTACT DETAILS

Epiphone
www.epiphone.com

Then there's the floating neck; by its very nature, the gap between the raised end of the bridge, suspended over the body as it is, and the body below, is so high that jazzers and folkies will love the way it allows you to dig it at the neck end. This means that the natural tone is slightly muffled, lacking the crisp edge that you'd get if you dug in down by the bridge – which means in turn that plugging in and rolling on the treble is highly advised.

Finally, the neck profile – a full, unapologetic C shape – doesn't exactly lend itself to fast fretting and barre chord changes, so a lick of extra volume from the preamp will be welcome, because it means you have to work slightly less hard. For all these reasons, the Zenith sounds bigger, better and more professional when plugged in.

So what are the amplified sounds actually like? 'Authentic' is the word that springs to mind. With the EQ control set flat, there's more than a touch of mids-heavy snap to the tone, with more of the slightly harsh edge we mentioned above. Roll that off a bit and punch the volume, and you're given a more sociable tone – one that won't scare the neighbours' dog but which still has clarity. Whatever Epiphone were striving for when they designed this resolutely historic-looking instrument, they seem to have achieved it.

Is the Zenith for you? That depends on your predilection for instruments with serious presence. It's a big old chunk of wood, both under your fretting fingers and on your lap; you need to play it with power and conviction if you're to maximise the return on your £679. Approach it half-heartedly and it won't respond as well as it would to a full-motion strum. It's that kind of guitar; a beast that wants to fight back.

If that's not your cup of tea, that is totally understandable – and there are plenty of excellent alternatives at a similar price who will be happy to roll over and let you tickle their tummies, so to speak.

CONCLUSION

The Zenith may be slightly unusual, but that's no bad thing in a world of similar-looking guitars. Sure, its tone range is a little odd, but again, it's an alternative to the usual warm, woody sounds – and its character may suit your requirements perfectly. You won't know until you give it a try, so seek out an Epiphone dealer (and take a heavy-gauge pick with you). Sometimes what we need is what other musicians don't – and we're fortunate that options exist to go outside the norm. This guitar offers you that option. ■

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VOX VX50AG

Ollie McGhie finds out if VOX's latest amp – with Nutube technology – can help gigging players take their show on the road

In 2017 VOX celebrated 60 years of industry prominence serving the good, the bad and the ugly: from Brian May to Paul McCartney and Elvis Costello. VOX started the year in Anaheim, at NAMM 2017, where their MV50 heads pipped all other amplifiers to the post, winning in the Amps category. This was the first time the world saw Nutube technology, a system developed by Korg which can now be found in Vox's most recent release – the VX50AG. As part of a new series of three amps – VX – these amps all come with 50 watts of power and an 8" speaker. There's one model for the bass guitar and one for the piano. The one I'm trialing is the acoustic guitar option.

The box it comes in is light. I initially wonder whether the amplifier might have been accidentally left at the factory. But with the padding debris aside, the amplifier is indeed there, and it is featherweight compared to the average acoustic guitar and hard case combined weight (it's actually 4.1kg). A reason for this is the Nutube technology consisting of: an analogue pre-amp circuit; a low-voltage vacuum tube, which works in the same way as a triode vacuum tube, and low power – all of which allows the amp to fit into a smaller package. A 40-minute round trip to my local guitar store on-foot, with a broken toe and the amp in tow, was reassuringly uneventful and the amp wasn't an impedance. At times I even forgot I was carrying it. This VX50AG is certainly something for musicians who need to travel.

The colour of the main body is a flecked black single piece of ABS polymer. The colour of the front of the amplifier, surrounding the cover over the speaker, is a little questionable – a hue somewhere between marshwiggle mud and green olives. It's trying to be high-quality but this is possibly the one, and only one, truly disappointing feature of the amp, and it's hardly noticeable on a dark stage. The bass guitar equivalent is a solid all-round black, revealing a sultry red beneath the cover of the front; the piano version has a tuxedo black and white colour palette. So it's a bit disappointing the way the acoustic model turned out.

The speaker itself is a two-way coaxial one (with a tweeter) for a wide frequency response – which means it can capture both the highs and the lows of your performance, technically and emotionally. There's a bass reflex structure at play too in order to deliver a rich, low-frequency sound. The ABS polymer chassis, as well as obviously being lightweight, provides acoustic properties, which aid in producing this sound (and these are sounds which are pretty much unattainable from your standard wooden cabinets). There's no hidden compartment for storing the power cables, so you will have to store them the proper way.

"At times I even forgot I was carrying it"

The panel has a very simple set-up. Two main inputs – one instrument jack with bass, middle and treble EQ, and a mic jack with pretty much the same controls. The only difference is that the instrument line has an effects knob, so I'm unable to tell what my voice sounds like with a chorus effect, but the vocal line does have reverb, but no mid-range frequency knob.

The sound this amp produces is generally extremely accurate. There's no hiding the sticky fingers, slide, buzz or tap – all guitar-playing nuances are there, so this model probably isn't for newbie beginners who need a glossy finish to their sound. Practising with this amp would probably be a good idea, if you need to polish your playing. On the other hand a clean run of scales makes you sound like a pro.

Taking the amp through its paces I test it first with my nylon-stringed guitar. Leaving the controls on the guitar preamp flat the resultant sound is also pretty flat so I have to turn the bass and treble up to get the

VOX

most accurate/pleasing to the ear tone. The chorus effect comes across a little strangely on the nylon-stringed guitar, particularly with fingerstyle playing, but some subtle chordal riffs, while muting the strings with the right hand makes for some pretty sweet tones.

Dialling up to the reverb effects, you have to turn the effect knob up manually. A nice addition might have been the ability to use a footswitch with the effects. The reverb is, as expected, a reverb effect. There's a very slight, hardly distinct digital vibe to it, which detracts somewhat from the general warmth of the sound. The third effect is a combination of the two.

Combined with vocals on the other channel it's very easy to adjust the overall volume, as well as the balance between voice and instrument. The bass and treble EQ are quite sufficient to make my voice and guitar sound as harmonious as they can be. I can even bust a gut in my apartment without shocking the

VOX VX50AG

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: VOX
Model: VX50AG
RRP: £229
Power Consumption: 65 watts
Power Supply: AC adapter (DC 19V)
Dimensions: (W x D x H): 354 mm × 208mm × 313mm/ 13.94" × 8.19" × 12.32"
Net Weight: 4.1kg (9lbs)
Features: 50W of high output; vacuum tube sound of Nutube technology; two-channel design with instrument and mic channels; bass reflex structure

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Lightweight and powerful
Cons: No facility for an effects footswitch
Overall: A warm sound from a powerful single-unit set-up for the singer-songwriter

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★☆
Sound Quality: ★★★★☆
Overall: ★★★★☆

CONTACT DETAILS

http://voxamps.com

> **"Some subtle chordal riffs, while muting the strings with the right hand, makes for some pretty sweet tones"**

neighbours (when using the amp to add an extra layer of depth to the sound, rather than as a means to reach a new audience up on the fourth floor).

With an acoustic steel-stringed instrument the amp makes an equally clear, if not cleaner, sound. The EQ mix changes slightly: the guitar comes down a couple of notches and the bass frequency in the voice comes up. There's still a good, clear balance and the projection is crisp. The tonal resonance is emphasized further by VOX's use of wooden baffling.

The mic line has a phantom power switch so vocalists can use condenser mics, though mine is an industry standard SM58. An integral phase switch is included on the amp too. This counteracts low-frequency range interference (or, more colloquially, it's designed to eliminate feedback from the mic jack). In practice, I have no need of this and the phase switch is left to its own devices.

Red clipping indicator lights illuminate, like evil eyes, in the volume control for each line. This is a useful indication that you need to turn the volume down, or distorted sounds are present. The power LED is a refreshing bright blue. A small rectangular grid of holes by the master volume also emit the same cool blue.

Another useful function the VX50AG has (for a person such as myself juggling work commitments with the whims of a two-year-old, whose requirements may force me to leave my workstation unattended for a few hours) is an auto power-off. If left without any operation for four hours, it'll switch itself off. To get it going again, just turn it on again.

The line-out will feed your sound directly to a PA system, so there's no need to be limited by the size (and weight) of this amp. At the same time there is a headphone jack, so the amp need never go further than your bedroom, though having spent a bit of time with the amplifier I'd recommend taking it further afield. In a bedroom environment it does produce a bit of a hum, so using headphones when playing is probably your best bet to reduce the grey noise.

At £229 (inc. VAT) the VX50AG is at a very respectable mid-low range budget. It's a simple design with the silver VOX logo stamped to the front of each model. This amp does need hands-on attention during performance particularly with the effects but it's the perfect single-unit set-up and the aux in function allows you to mix backing music into your performance.

If you're in the market for something like this, it's definitely one to try out... Go on, you know you want to. ■

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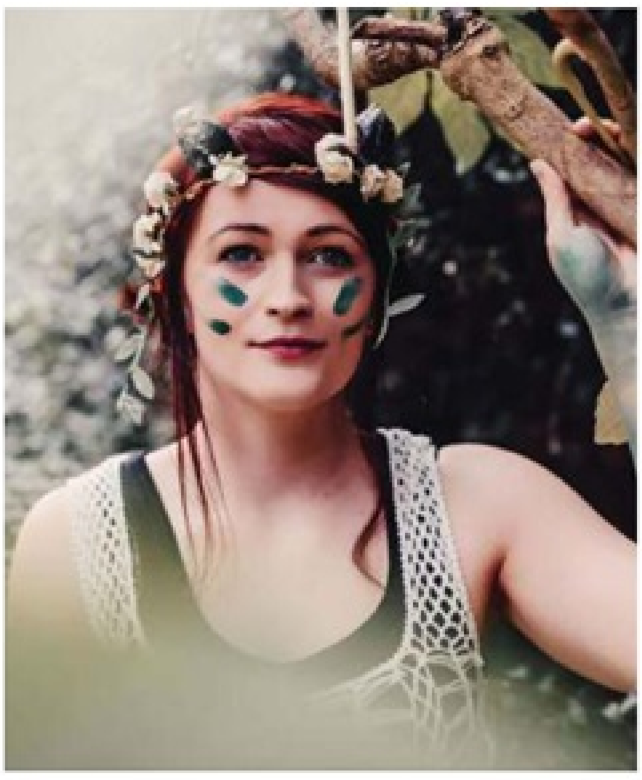

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FURCH HQ

In the rubble of Communism in the Czech Republic, Furch Guitars blossomed. Sam Wise tours their premises and learned more about their fascinating history

Standing in the courtyard of the converted farm buildings that house Furch Guitars' 70 strong factory, Petr Furch strikes an unexpected figure in the evening light. Casually dressed and tousled, he's every inch the Silicon Valley entrepreneur, yet the story he tells has a distinctly Iron Curtain flavour...

IN THE BEGINNING

His father, company founder Frantisek Furch, was part of a local bluegrass scene which was an unlikely Rebel Alliance to the Communist regime's Galactic Empire. American music attracted a foment of dissenting political opinion, but could not attract high quality instruments, so Furch, an engineer, resolved to make his own. Starting with a banjo, because the availability of a snare drum reduced the amount of building required, he soon graduated to guitars. By the time the Iron Curtain came down, good guitars with the Furch name on them were circulating, and as soon as it became possible to run a business, he was able to begin.

Today's Furch factory is a far cry from those early days, but remains in the town of Velké Nemcice, in the South West of the Czech Republic, near what's now the border with Slovakia. It's one of the biggest employers in the town, employing very few people with a prior interest in guitar, but rather local people with a commitment to the area, who want to work with their hands and be involved in making something beautiful. Furch initially made Ovation-style roundback guitars, operating initially from a single room with only a couple of employees. But by the time Petr joined, things had changed. He did not initially aspire to work for his father long term; like so many of us, he thought his future would be in rock 'n' roll, but he took a job, initially finishing guitars, to make ends meet. The site where the factory currently sits was a long abandoned farm; Petr remembers playing there as a child, climbing in over the walls, and taking risks playing amongst rusting farm machinery. Furch Guitars, still under the guiding hand of Frantisek, moved there in the early 2000s, restoring the existing buildings and adding more.

As the company grew, Petr worked on each part of the production, learning more about how guitars were built, and starting to have ideas of his own. Frantisek always thought like a production engineer, rather than a craftsman; his aim was always to find ways to improve the process, to make the quality of the guitars more predictable and repeatable, and Petr, who had not always had the best relationship with his father, found that he thought the same way. "I gradually realised that I wasn't going to add much to the world as a musician, and to think that maybe the best way for me to give something to the world is with building great guitars," Petr explains.

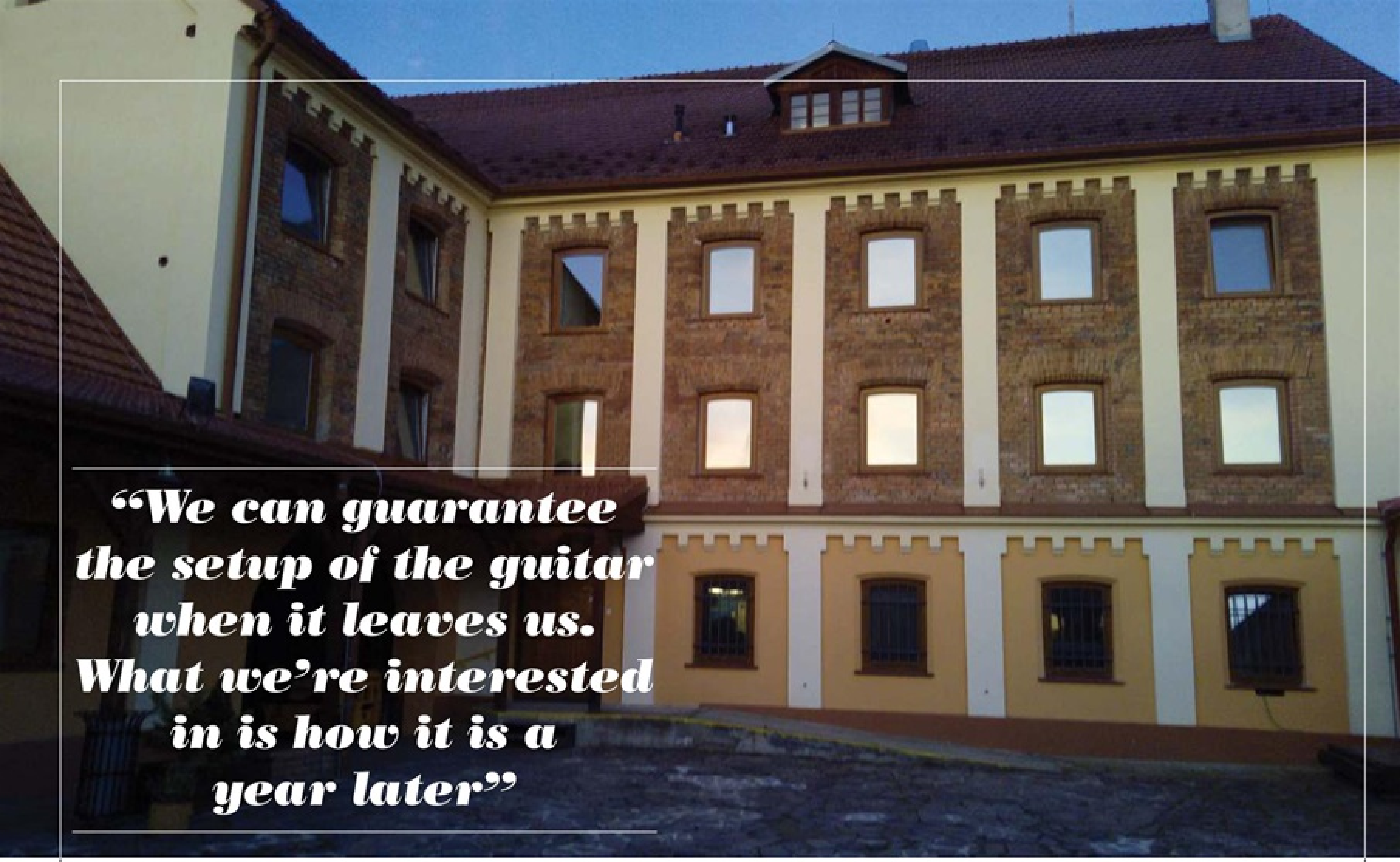
21ST CENTURY AMBITIONS

Petr's inspiration, and the company he aims to compete with, is Taylor; the desire to make very high quality guitars at scale, removing quality problems, and as a result, removing doubt from their customers' minds. Whether you like Taylor guitars or not, there's no question that you know what you're going to get, and Furch shares that philosophy. This becomes clear as we stand in the wood store, discussing the selection of woods, and their utility in guitar making. We're discussing the benefits of different fingerboard materials, and I mention that plenty of internet forum guitar experts claim to be able to describe the sonic differences between rosewood and ebony as fingerboard materials. Petr laughs and says, "No, you can't tell the difference. We know the difference, we've measured it. You can't hear it." This refreshingly scientific attitude to guitar building's sacred cows characterises Furch's thinking in all areas. He's not interested in entering into a subjective, philosophical debate about aspects of guitar construction, he wants to calibrate a measurement tool, find out an answer that's close enough for all practical purposes, and get on with applying that knowledge to building excellent guitars. This comes through again as we discuss the quality of woods for top, back and sides of guitars. I mention the practice of tap testing potential guitar tops, and the response is instructive. "We make 7,500 guitars per year, and we aim to one day make 20,000. I don't think that tap testing is the most effective way to get the right results anyway; we can do better by using the bracing and build of the guitar to get the right result, but if I did, is it possible to tap test 160,000 pieces of spruce?" Furch's focus on repeatability and reliable quality precludes anything as subjective.

As Petr puts it, "We can 100 per cent guarantee the state and setup of the guitar when it leaves our factory. What we're interested in now is trying to control how it is a year later." To this end, Furch have innovated their truss rod design, running the rod through a carbon reinforced tube, and bracing it at the heel with an alloy casting which maintains position. Petr describes a visit by a sales rep for PLEK, a German machine which measures guitars, simulates the tension of strings, and dresses the frets to get a perfect setup. Gibson use this machine for their most expensive guitars, to ensure quality. When an employee placed a Furch guitar, fresh from the production line, into the machine, the results were, apparently, good enough that the conversation about whether Furch needed the machine was effectively over.

RIGHT FIRST TIME

This focus on doing everything right, first time, every time is evident all over the factory. Specially modified CNC tools for every task, and cleverly thought-out production processes everywhere you look mean excellent results every time. Petr Furch has even collaborated with a finishing manufacturer to create a new guitar finish which is many times harder



> "We can guarantee the setup of the guitar when it leaves us. What we're interested in is how it is a year later"

and more durable than existing finishes, and invested in a CNC robotic polishing system which is not only innovative, but also mesmerising to watch. The Furch philosophy isn't for everyone; looking at the laser cutting machine they use for inlay work makes me irrationally yearn for a zen-like craftsman with a chisel, but there's no arguing with the results. The journey to the door of Furch Guitars for me began with a Millennium Line 24, sent to me for review, when I had never heard of Furch. I was blown away by that guitar, and a visit to a Brno guitar shop which apparently holds 70 Furch guitars in stock confirms that the quality really is outstanding across the board. I played five or six very different models on that visit, and was hard pressed not to put a 2017 Limited Edition model on my credit card and bring it home.

Petr Furch is a man with a vision, and meeting him confirms the impression the guitar I reviewed gave me; here was a serious competitor to Martin and Taylor at a significantly lower price. If you want a beautifully unique handmade guitar, Furch are not for you, but if you want a high end, professional tool, which you can rely on to be good out of the box and every night thereafter, Furch should be on your list. They may not always be cheaper than the competition, but currently, they represent a genuine bargain. ■

Info: www.furch.cz/en/

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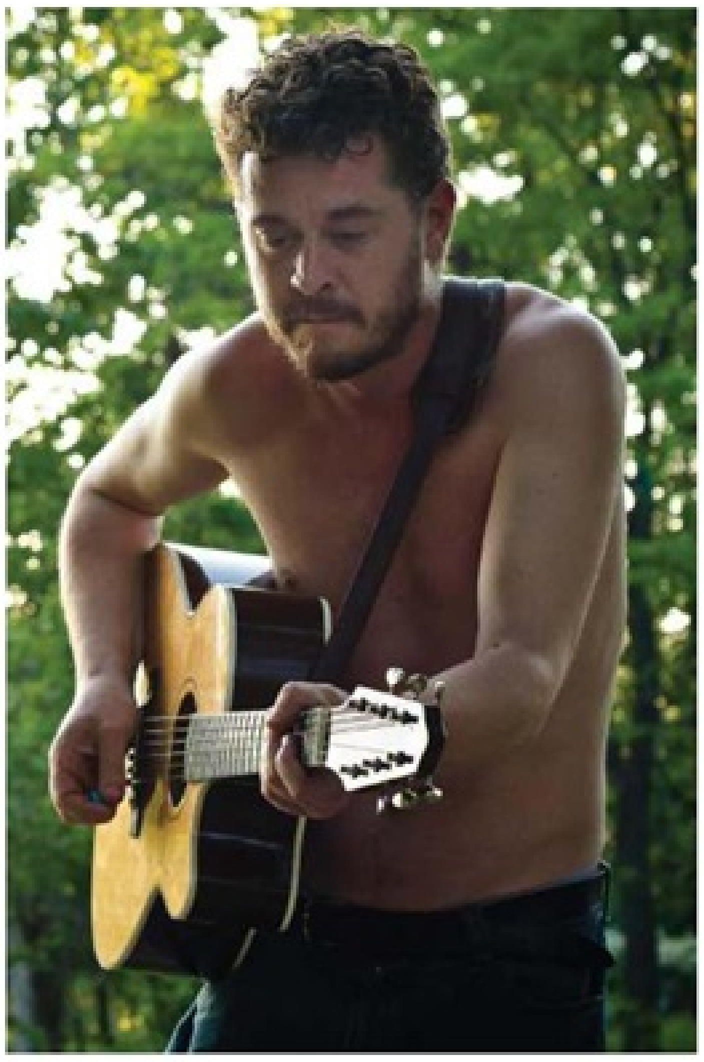
ERINN PEET-LUKES

STYLE… BLUEGRASS

I'm a 27-year-old singer-songwriter and guitarist, living in Golden, Colorado. In middle school, my best friend taught me some chords. I started to look songs up online and teach myself more. Eventually I got an amazing guitar teacher who loved folk music and introduced me to Joni Mitchell. My band, Thunder And Rain, formed in 2013 with Pete Weber (mandolin), Ian Haegele (upright bass) and myself (guitar and vocals). Chris Herbst (dobro) joined us in 2016. Since then we've played everything from festivals to breweries, weddings to birthday parties, dude ranches to clubs. Our second album, *Start Believing*, is beyond bluegrass but not quite tuned up enough to be Nashville country – I'm hoping it can bring the fans of those genres together. The title track comes from my belief that religion and spirituality are important. It's a cry for everyone to believe in something when times are rough. My favourite track, though, is 'The Reckoning'. I love the slow groove, the rolling banjo, and the subject matter feels important. I always write with an acoustic – usually I start with an interesting progression and try to hum over it until something sticks. I use drop D on a few tunes, but otherwise I keep it standard. I play a Taylor 710CE dreadnought made of dark California rosewood with the smallest hint of a tobacco sunburst around the soundhole. I love how the tone is deeper than most Taylors. I use a Wegen flat pick and play mostly bluegrass-style rhythm. The whole band plays through Grace DIs and I sing into a gold Telefunken mic that my band affectionately nicknamed the "Diva Mic". Currently I have a solo project in the works, which will focus more on stripped-down folk. We're also working on booking summer tours.

www.thunderandrainmusic.com



JEZ HELLARD

STYLE… FOLK

I'm 39, live in a former post office van and sing, pick guitar and play harmonica with The Djukella Orchestra. Djukella means mongrel, and the musicians come from around the UK and Ireland. Besides myself, our line-up includes James Gavin (fiddle), Alastair Caplin (viola), Nye Parsons (double bass), Tommie Black-Roff (accordion) and Dominic Henderson (pipes, whistles). We play traditional and contemporary folk from jigs, reels and ballads to tango, rhumba, reggae and bluegrass. Based in Bristol, we've toured the UK, Canada, Germany, the Balkans and beyond, and have released three albums. Our latest, *D'rect From The Shire*, was recorded live. Its theme is anti-war, integrationist and positive politics, presented in the rural/folksy aesthetics of gardening, grandmas and jam-making. My favourite track is 'Atlas Tango', because we tear it up. I play a Jimmy Moon 0003 OM with a Sitka spruce top and Indian rosewood back and sides. It sings like a bell and smells like a dream. DADGAD is my usual tuning, but I also occasionally use standard. What I play through depends on the gig. The built-in Fishman pick-up/preamp is great – sounds just like my guitar but louder. If folk-trained sound crew are available we'll use Neumann condenser mics; if not, just DI. I can fingerpick in the standard manner, but with flatpicking I can really express myself. I use purple Dunlop Tortex picks and a Shubb capo. I also have a box of 22 diatonic harmonicas and a chromatic. We're currently working on a new studio album. We're also launching James Gavin's album *Chewing The Fat* at London's Union Chapel on February 5, followed by a tour to support that. Djukella Orchestra will play a tour in March/April and at festivals throughout the summer.

www.jezhellard.com

YVONNE LYON

STYLE... ROOTS/FOLK/ AMERICANA

Based near Glasgow, I'm a 40-year-old singer/songwriter. Although I trained on piano and studied music for two years at Glasgow University, I'm a self-taught guitarist. My new album, *Metanoia*, is due for release in January. 'Metanoia' can refer to a new way of seeing, especially after things have fallen apart. This reflects my own journey along with that of the songs, some of which were written for different collaborative projects or to particular songwriting briefs. I'm amazed how pertinent they are to the theme and how they speak to me. My favourite track is 'Hope'. I love how it pushes the boundaries – and hearing the completed track helped give me the impetus to shape the rest of the album. I mainly perform with my Martin OM-28 CE, which is very comfortable with a beautiful tone. I also own a Taylor 414CE, a Fylde Tenor and a Taylor NS32CE, which are all fantastic in their own ways. I also use a Boss TU-3 tuner and a G7th Nashville capo. I can play with a pick (I use Gibson), but I'll always gravitate naturally to fingerpicking. For most gigs I use an Orchid preamp and for house concerts my AER Compact 60. My songwriting is inspired by overheard conversations, snippets of moments, observations of life, nature and a desire to tell stories. I find songwriting extremely helpful for processing thoughts and emotions. The acoustic guitar is an intimate instrument for writing. I usually noodle with chords and melody, then think about lyrics later – although sometimes it's the other way round. Alternate tunings? Yes, I use DADGAD and recently tried an open F# tuning in capo 3 for 'Where The Poor Find Gold'. I'm currently busy promoting and touring my new album as well as working on a few other collaborative projects.
www.yvonnelyonmusic.com

JAAN JAAGO

STYLE... ESTONIAN FOLK/ BLUEGRASS

Playing music has made me realise how deeply connected humankind is. Whether you're jamming with musicians from South Korea, Uganda, Chile, India, Croatia or Russia; the connection is there through music. I'm a 29-year-old guitar player from Estonia. Through playing, as well as learning about, different folk music of the world, I've formed a special attachment to steel-string guitar and acoustic music. Curly Strings – the band I'm in – comprises Eeva Talsi (lead vocals, fiddle), Villu Talsi (mandolin), Taavet Niller (double bass) and myself (guitar). We formed five years ago and have reshaped the Estonian music scene by helping folk music achieve mainstream status. Our new album, *Hoolima* – which translates into English as 'Caring' – came out in January. Lyrically, it feels more personal, while musically it's more nuanced and layered. My favourite track is 'Teisipäeval' ('On A Tuesday') because it tells a beautiful story and evolves in a satisfying way. It was fantastic to have the input of producer Casey Driessen and engineer Dani Castelar, sculpting the sound and taking things to a new level. My main guitar was custom-made by Estonian luthier Kristjan Kapp. It has a sinker redwood top, ziricote sides and ebony fingerboard. I also recently acquired a Blueridge parlour, which has been a surprising inspiration. I have a K&K Trinity system on the custom guitar, and a LR Baggs Lyric for the parlour guitar. While recording the new album I occasionally used some effects, but mostly I keep things acoustic. I normally play with a pick, but I also try – and fail – to fingerpick. I've experimented with different tunings, but nowadays the occasional DADGAD and drop D is all I use. We're currently touring the new album, and also looking forward to collaborations with an a capella group, a chamber orchestra and other artists.
www.curlystrings.ee

LILLY HIATT

TRINITY LANE ★★★★★

WWW.LILLYHIATT.COM

To be the scion of a legend is never easy, comparisons are inevitable and come too easily. But on this showing John's little girl is certainly pulling out the stops to uphold the family songwriting flame. An album that reeks heartbreak and turmoil, 'I get so bored I wanna get drunk', she sings on the title track, Lilly's vocals weave a line between cracked Nashville emotion on tracks like 'The Night David Bowie Died', and heartrending, little-girl-vulnerability. With a tremendous production by Michael Trent that's a bit Daniel Lanois– understated guitars and washes of moody keys – this is one cracking album. Reflective but not without moments of wild abandon, her Pa must be proud. **JP**

I'M WITH HER

SEE YOU AROUND ★★★★☆

WWW.IMWITHHERBAND.COM

Gestated after an off-the-cuff performance at the 2014 Telluride Bluegrass Festival and recorded live at Real World Studios, this collaboration by Sara Watkins, Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan is an inspired one. Hinging around the group's bittersweet harmonies, producer Ethan Johns sensibly allows the vocals to soar against their sparse, understated acoustic backing. And as you'd expect with this much talent on offer, from the jig-a-jig instrumental 'Waitsfield' to the sensual, whispered 'Ryland (Under The Apple Tree)', there's no shortage of inspiration, and the chemistry between the three band members is a treat to hear. **JP**

KEEGAN MCINROE

A GOOD OLD FASHIONED PROTEST

★★★☆☆

WWW.KEEGANMCINROE.COM

Texas based McInroe has a hefty chip on his shoulder about the way things are going out there. He turns on obvious objects of scorn like the present White House incumbent in his 'Talking Talking Head Blues', a deceptively gentle talking blues a la Woody Guthrie, American foreign policy in 'Bombing For Peace', and the sad WW1 events of 'Christmas 1914'. However well intentioned, the danger is the yawn factor; we all know what's going on. But the prevailing mood of hard times is solidly underpinned by Keegan's raw vocals and delivery, leaving no option other than to hear him out. **JP**

SALT HOUSE

UNDERSONG ★★★☆☆

WWW.SALTHOUSEMUSIC.COM

Recorded in a restored church on the island of Berneray in the Outer Hebrides, the music of this Scottish trio is as haunting as the wonderful island landscape depicted on the CD sleeve. Jenny Sturgeon's gently wheezing harmonium is the backdrop for 'Charmer', a love song inspired by 'ol Robbie Burns, with more poetic influence courtesy of Robert Frost, his poem the 'Road Not Taken' building behind Lauren MacColl's undulating Gaelic vocals. There's a wonderful spiritual sense to the band's material, and even if it breaks the spell, it's hats off to Ewan MacPherson for digging up 'I Sowed Some Seeds', a traditional song from Dorset about…? Well you guess. **JP**

ACOUSTIC 70S

VARIOUS ★★☆☆☆

WWW.WARNERBROSMUSIC.COM

Easy money? When record companies trawl their back catalogues and throw a bunch of tracks together, the danger signals inevitably flash. So is this one to avoid ? First off forget the 'acoustic' tag. And in fairness, although there are many 'clinkers' in this three-CD set, there're also many forgotten gems; 'Willing' by Little Feat, Bonnie Raitt's 'Love Me Like A Man', Patti Smith's 'Because The Night', and an unplugged version by Eric Clapton of 'Layla' are all worth the price of admission. Quite how 'Three Times A Lady' by the Commodores made the cut is one of those mysteries to which perhaps we shouldn't be given an answer, but there's enough here to hope it might have turned up in your stocking. **JP**

BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE

MEDICINE SONGS ★★★☆☆

WWW.BUFFYSAINTE-MARIE.COM

If you remember Donovan then it's odds on you'll have heard 'The Universal Soldier'. Written by Buffy Sainte Marie, it's more than 50 years since the lady first erupted onto the scene, and her anti war songs and diatribes against the American government for despoiling Indian lands – Buffy was born a Cree – left no one in doubt that she was one tough cookie. And now she's back, the power of her rhetoric undimmed, taking a swipe at 'billionaire bullies' Bush and Saddam on 'The War Racket', and laying it on the line for the Indians with the pitiful tale of 'Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee'. Pulling no punches, she still fights her corner with a fire that's impossible to ignore and totally heartfelt. Watch out Donald. **JP**

FRONT COUNTRY

OTHER LOVE SONGS ★★★☆☆

WWW.FRONTCOUNTRYBAND.COM

This hot quintet from the Bay Area of San Francisco are fronted by Melody Walker, who proves when she sings the Carter Family's 'Storms On The Ocean' that she's effortlessly capable of conjuring up the sweet, aching vocals of Bonnie Raitt. It's an unexpected turn of events for an outfit who with fiddle, guitars, mandolin and banjo, appear firmly rooted in an old timey bluegrass orbit. And they do work up a sweat when they play a mandolin breakdown like 'T.H.A.T.S.', but it's the inventive arrangements that continually surprise as they deal out the honky tonk vibe of the rocking 'Lonesome Town', or David Olney's introspective 'Millionaire.' It adds up to imaginative music from a band that transcend any obvious expectations. **JP**

KATE RUSBY

ANGELS & MEN ★★★★☆

WWW.KATERUSBY.COM

Dwarfed by an enormous pair of wings, Rusby looks strangely pensive on her CD sleeve: a shame because, as festive albums go, this one is a cut above the contenders. Of course, if you're going to handle a bunch of 'old chestnuts' like 'Deck The Halls' and 'Let It Snow', then being blessed with a sparkling voice like hers is always a distinct advantage. But it's the unexpected twists and turns, and producer Damien O'Kane's arrangements that will intrigue; the jovial take of Richard Thompson's dour 'We'll Sing Hallelujah', Ron Block adding banjo to 'Santa Never Brings Me A Banjo' introduced by a sample of Kate's daughter, and the ethereal grandeur of 'Paradise'. **JP**

THE 19TH STREET BAND

THE THINGS THAT MATTER ★★★☆☆

WWW.19THSTREETBAND.COM

Formed by an émigré Irishman and his fiddling American wife, there's nothing deep or fancy here, just meat and potatoes good time music played with huge exuberance. Hearty hooks and harmonies abound and when the band get moving on the driving 'Trouble', there's a feeling they're an express train that doesn't want to stop. As if this wasn't enough, Tom Verratti's banjo hits warp speed on the redemptive 'Set Me Free', a kind of Dolly Parton workout, before Cadlaidre Davis calms down to get wistful on 'The Things That Matter'. This bunch sound like they're having a ball. **JP**

ROSS AINSLIE

SANCTUARY ★★★★☆

WWW.ROSSAINSLIE.COM

Ross Ainslie is a Scottish piper who began playing at the tender age of eight, which probably explains why his virtuosity on this album is simply stunning. Apparently taking inspiration from Mike Oldfield's 'Tubular Bells', Ross's concept is that the tracks should be allowed to segue into one another. The result is a musical journey that is really quite extraordinary. From the glorious 'Surroundings', his whistle floating over soft folding ambient loops, with master Indian musicians Zakir Hussain on Table and Soumik Datta's droning Sarod, the music morphs from one arena of subtle beauty to the next, creating raw enchantment and wonderment in about equal measure. **JP**

THE WHITE BUFFALO

DARKEST DARKS LIGHTEST LIGHTS ★★★★☆

WWW.THEWHITEBUFFALO.COM

From the opening bars of 'Hide And Seek', the unstoppable force of nature that is Jake Smith roars out of the speakers with visceral gravitas, a kind of drawling country slouch holding its own over crashing drums and throbbing guitars. One of those albums that makes you wonder what the heck might happen next, after the sub Springsteen bounce of 'Avalon', the 'ol Buffalo slips into Tom Waitsian ranting mode over the cranky spaced out rhythms of 'Robbery', before coming on all soft for 'The Observatory' droning 'everybody needs love.' It's all a bit whacky but hugely enjoyable. **JP**

MANDOLIN ORANGE

BLINDFALLER ★★★☆☆

WWW.MANDOLINORANGE.COM

Quite apart from Americans having all the best Highway names, when they get to singing about lonesome whistles and railroads, they always have the edge on us. And Mandolin Orange, a bluegrass duo from North Carolina, have that particular honky tonk ambience down to a tee. Aided and abetted by a four piece band, Emily Frantz and Andrew Marlin romp and stomp through 'Hard Travellin', a spiritual successor to Woody Guthrie's epic, and evoke the ghost of George Jones on the tearjerker 'Picking Up Pieces'. There's no shortage of great string bands travelling those lonesome dusty roads, but these guys stand out as special. **JP**

TOMMY EMMANUEL

ACCOMPLICE ★★★★★

WWW.TOMMYEMMANUEL.COM

Jason Isbell singing 'Deep River Blues' with Tommy vamping in restrained fashion, kicks off this feast of six-string craziness. And this is as laid back as it gets. From here on in Tommy plays host to an army of stupidly talented players, David Griseman, Clive Carroll, Jerry Douglas, Ricky Scaggs to name but four, all of whom lay down some predictably finger-blistering licks. All cut wonderfully live in the studio, no long distance overdubs – you can hear Tommy's grunts of enthusiasm – the album's chock a block with unexpected surprises, Hawaiian ukulele master Jake Shimabukuro and young Nashville hotshot JD Simo, and Mark Knopfler all pop up. Phenomenal is the only word. **JP**

DARLING WEST

WHILE I WAS ASLEEP ★★★☆☆

WWW.DARLINGWEST.NO/ENGLISH.COM

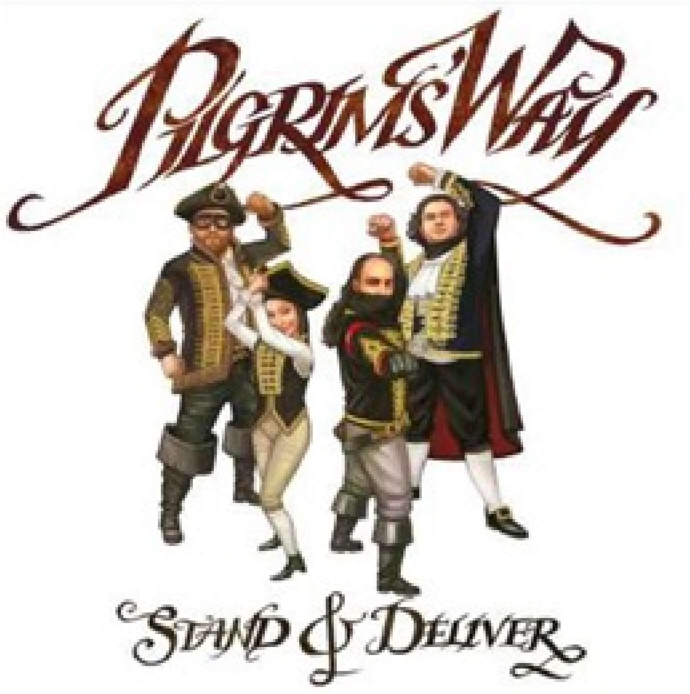
The inexorable global advance of Americana continues apace with this outfit, a Norwegian trio who are huge not just huge in their own country but also have been hitting the Country charts in the US itself. And make no mistake, when the Scandinavians decide to internalise a music, be it rockabilly, blues, punk, they play it with a fanatical attention to detail. So it's no surprise to hear that Darling West make a pretty good fist of making out like they've come from East Nashville, the album littered with pop melodies like the wistful 'Traveller', a lonesome pedal steel and strings echoing Mari Sandvaer Kreken's honey drizzled vocals. **JP**

TYLER CHILDERS

PURGATORY ★★★★★

WWW.TYLERCHILDERSMUSIC.COM

OK agreed this isn't the most enticing name for an album – or a song – but this slice of Appalachian country rock is as visceral as it gets; maybe what the Clash might have sounded like if they'd come from Lawrence County Kentucky. 'I wanted it to have that gritty mountain sound,' he says, and on this showing he's succeeded. Tyler's songs are spawned in a hard grafting culture where bluegrass may be on the radio, but dope and Donald Trump are a religion. Standouts include 'Whitehouse Road', a loping tale of teenage rebellion: 'Get me drinking that moonshine, higher than the grocery bill' are wonderful lines, worthy of Jack Kerouac. **JP**



PILGRIMS' WAY

STAND AND DELIVER ★★★☆☆

WWW.PILGRIMS-WAY.NET

Dedicated to 'those who desperately seek escape from the mundane', it's always good to be in a field of one, and delivering up a set of highwayman songs, this Stockport-based quartet certainly tick the box for originality. Playing 50 instruments between them, there's no shortage of unlikely arrangements or instruments – an Otamotone, a Japanese electric singing tadpole takes the honours on the 'Gaol Song' – as they romp through blood-curdling tales of a murdering hussy 'Shoot Them All Box On Her Head', and of course that Adam and the Ants classic, 'Stand And Deliver'. It's all slightly crazy, but jolly good fun for sure. **JP**

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GORDON GILTRAP INSTRUMENTAL ARTIST

'LUCKY'

FULL TAB ONLINE

Giltrap presents a song where careful fingering pays dividends

The interesting thing about revisiting old tunes of mine, which this one is, is that it reveals how my creative mind was working at the time – and how much easier the piece could be played if I had written it now. I'll indicate my choice of left-hand fingering to help with the piece's flow and also giving an alternate way of playing the opening bars.

The tuning for 'Lucky' is a favourite of mine, open G: DGDGBD. 'Heartsong' was written in this tuning along with one of my earliest tunes 'Fast Approaching'. What's not written on the TAB is the option of placing a capo at the second fret to give the piece a 'brighter' feel. This capo placing also makes some of the challenging stretches a tad easier.

Let's start by looking at the alternate way to play part of bar 3 where what is written is an open fourth string with a hammer up to the fifth fret followed by the second fret third string, where in actual fact it could be played thus: open fourth string then open third string then hammer third string followed by open second string then fret 2, third string pulled to open followed by open fourth string. These are still the same notes but approached in a different way. The choice, of course, is yours.

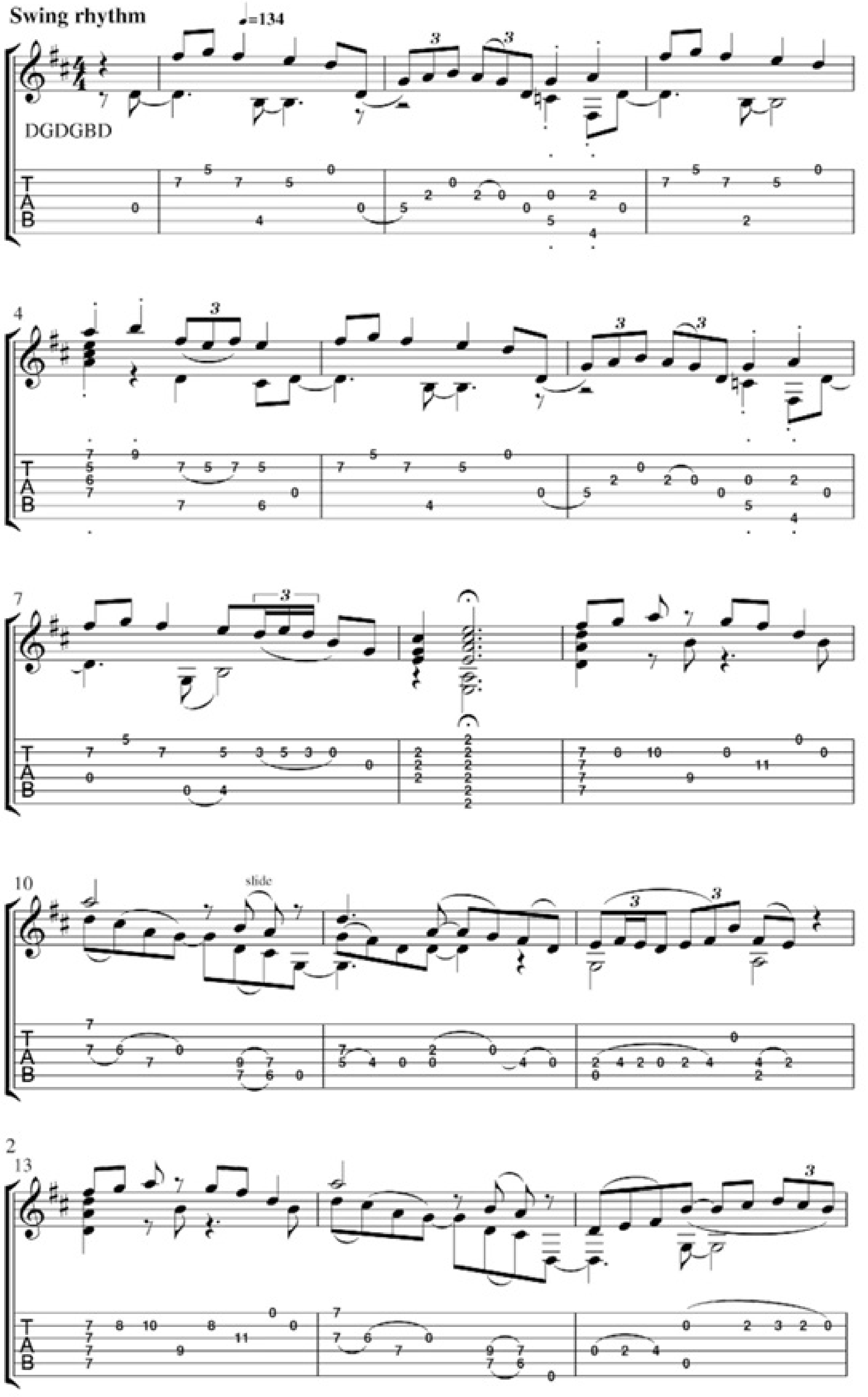
In bar 4 after the chord and fret 9 first string, the 7/5/7 pull off fourth and third finger left hand should be used and then first and second string for the remainder. In bar 7, fret 5 second string and fret 4, fifth string fourth and third finger, followed by 1/4/1.

In bars 10 we have fingers 3/2 then hammer with second finger then 4/1 for the slide part marked above the section. In bar 11: 4/2 then 1, then 1 again and then fourth finger. In bar 12 there is a swift legato section executed using first and fourth finger and finally 1/4 to pull to the second fret fourth string. OK, that's enough of the mind boggling left hand fingering! As the piece moves through, there are repeats of sections, and of course the same fingering applies.

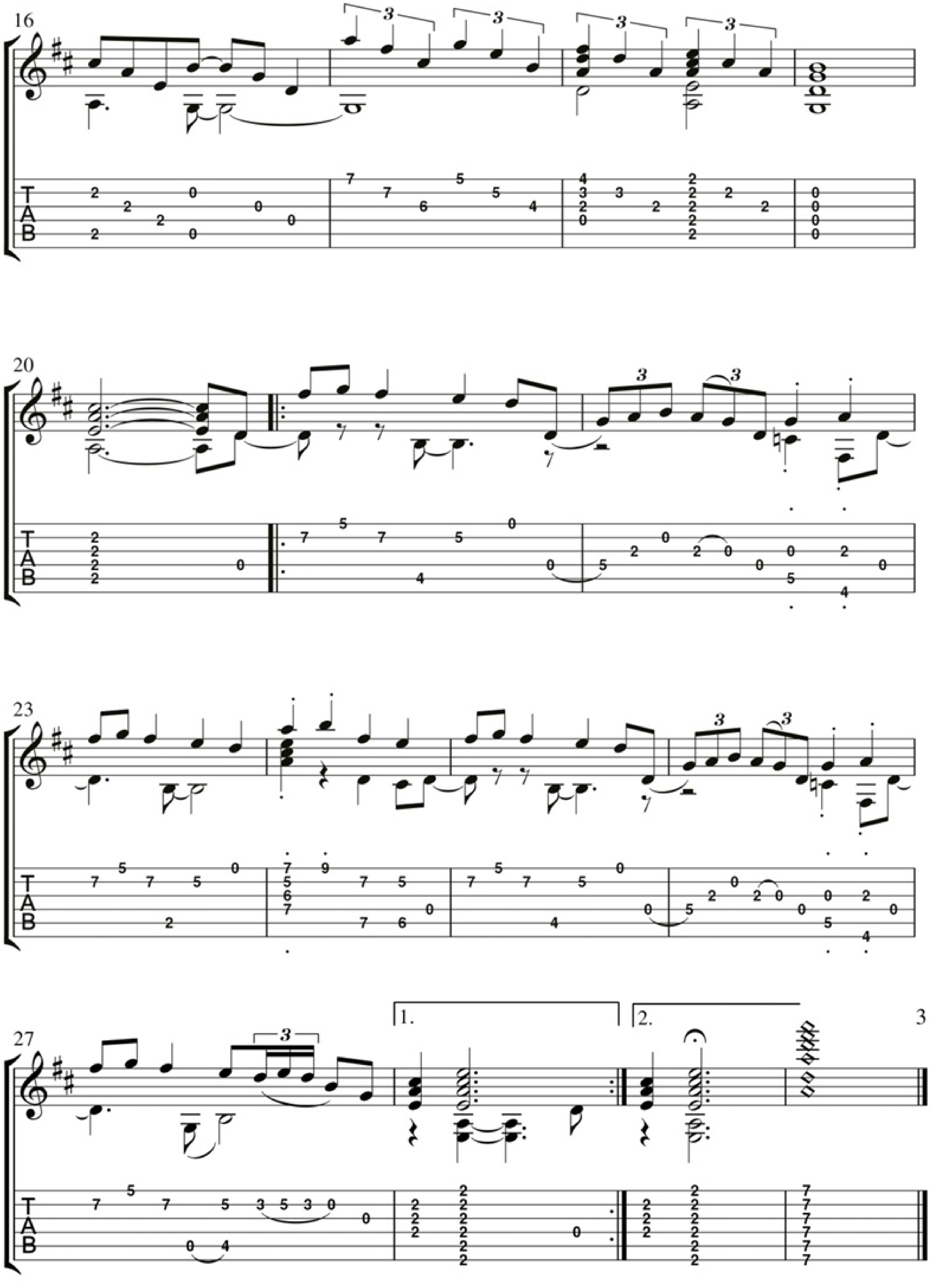
In spite of all the possibly confusing instructions, the piece should be fun to learn and perform, and should be approached in an optimistic, joyful and jaunty way.

Have fun and don't be put off by the suggested finger instructions, and I'm certain all will fall into place as you progress with the piece. ■

'LUCKY'



'LUCKY' (CONTINUED)



CHRIS GIBBONS COMPOSER

HAMMER, SLIDE OR PULL?

Too many ways to play a phrase, too little time! Gibbons shows us how

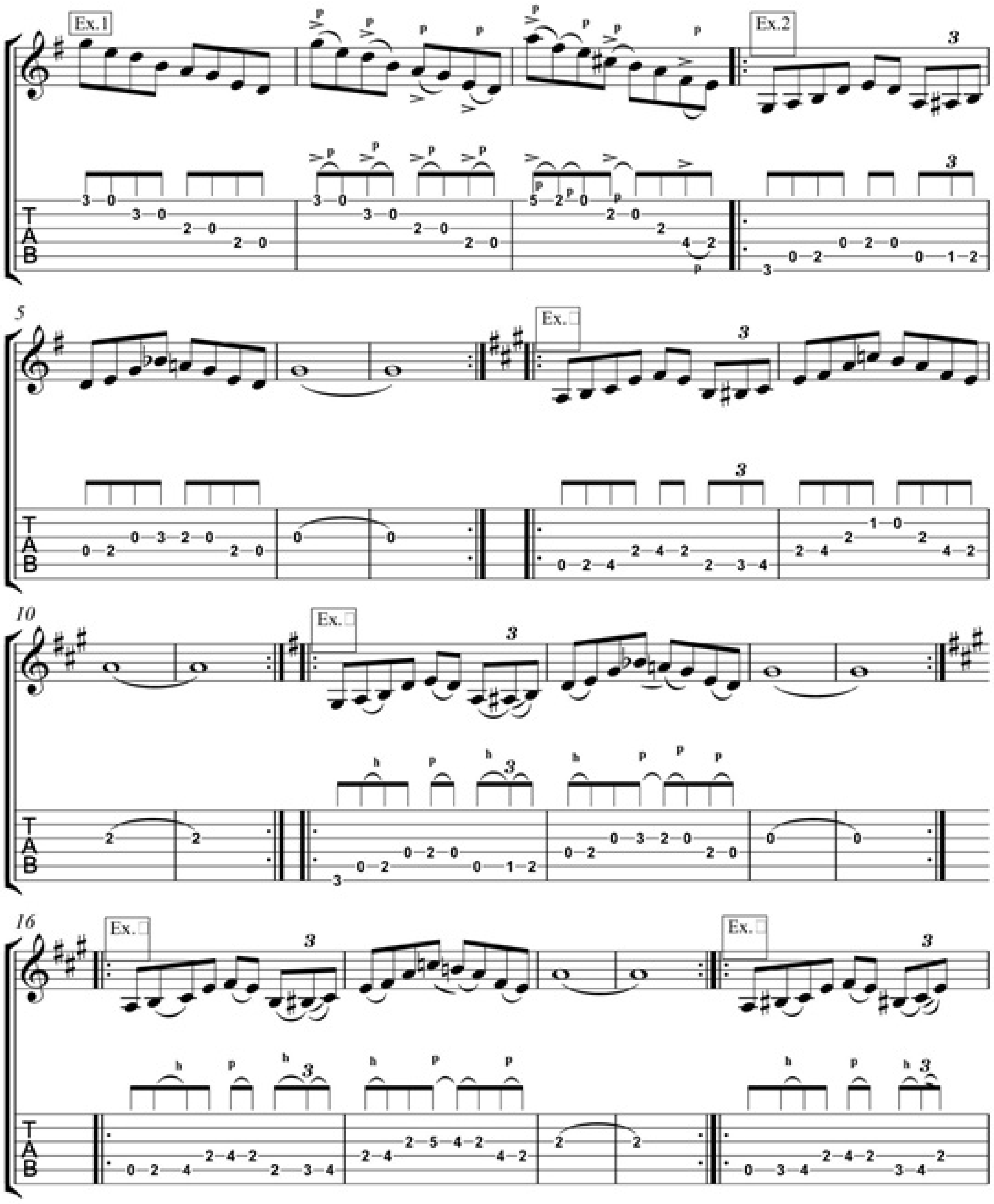
One of the delights, and also problems, of any stringed instrument is the amount of different locations where many phrases can be played, and the variety of techniques employed to sound a note and move from one note to the next.

The added complication occurs when the style of music, particularly in country/blues/bluegrass styles, involve the use of open strings coupled with various types of execution. The guitar in particular, with its irregular spacing of intervals (4,4,4,3,4) from string to string make it impossible to secure symmetrical fingering patterns across the fretboard, unlike the mandolin/violin family where all the strings are separated by a 5th.

We know that on the guitar we can pluck a note, and then pluck another note on the same string; but we can also sound a note and hammer onto the next note without plucking it again. The force of hammering down onto the note with the left hand finger coupled with the sustain from the previous note is enough to make it sound.

We can also pluck a note found at any fret (not an open string) and 'pull off' the finger with a little flick to sound a lower note, either fingered or open string. It is also possible to pick a fretted note and slide the finger up or down to the next note on the same string.

Now in country/blues style music, much of the typical style involves snappy phrases based on the use of open strings. Have a look at **Example 1**. You'll find a simple phrase in the key of G. The first bar you should play by picking every note.

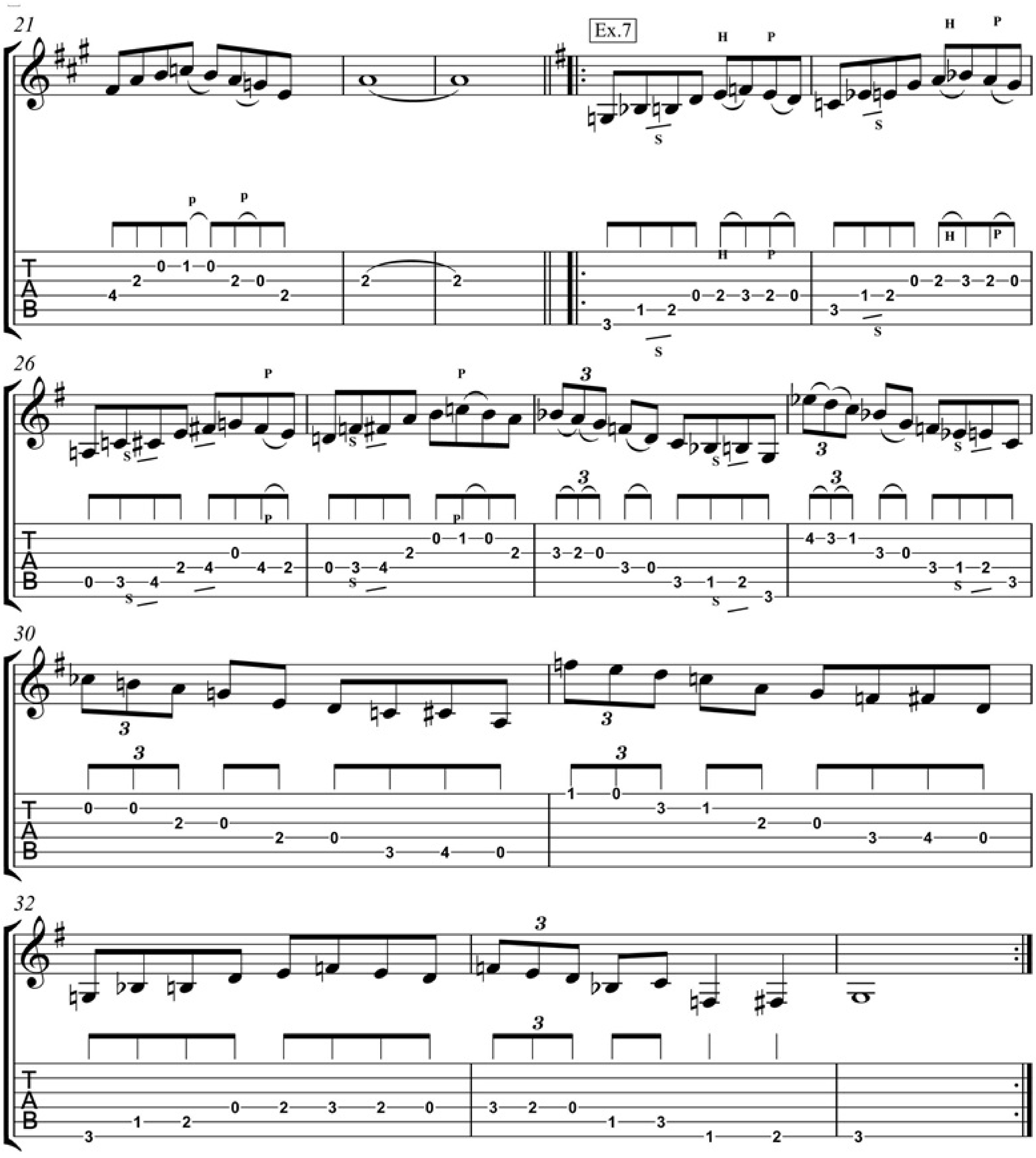


In the next bar we are using pull-offs from a fretted note to an open string to sound the note. Now that sounds very effective and the picking pattern is regular, pick then pull all the way down from one string to the next. If we have to transpose that phrase to a different key, the same regular order of alternate fretted notes and open strings is not possible; the open G is now A, a fretted note. You may of course fit a capo to the second fret, but if the transposition occurs within a song, that's just not possible: you have to re-finger the phrase. In doing so, the symmetry of the pull-offs is lost, but you will find a kind of quirkiness in that the accented notes will fall in a unique and syncopated rhythmic grouping. I've shown the accents with arrows above the notes. So this displays the inter-relation between fingering choices as phrases are played in a variety of keys and the rhythmic flow of a line. Please play these phrases slowly at first, and work the tempo up to speed gradually, once the head is confident. Also try to get a real 'snap' to the pull-offs by flicking the string slightly sideways: that is slightly down and away from you.

Now on **Example 2** we have a cool little four-bar phrase in the key of G. Play this slowly with the indicated fingering, picking each note.

In **Example 3** we have transposed this phrase up one whole step to the key of A. Play this through slowly as before, picking each note and observing the written tab fingering which includes open strings where possible.

Example 4 is the **Example 2** phrase but executed with pull-offs to the open strings wherever possible. Observe that we use the open strings nine times in the four-bar phrase.



Example 5 is the same phrase in the key of A, with the pull-offs, and hence the rhythmic accents, placed on the same beats as the example in G. You'll notice at once that the left hand is under more stress as two fingers are having to do the work of one in the G example to execute a pull-off without an open string as before.

But hey, this is our music, we can change things around to suit ourselves! For **Example 6**, I've changed the phrase slightly in the first bar which makes use of the E on fret 2 of the fourth string, this being a good anchor for the phrase, and I also changed the phrase on the second bar to make use of more open strings and create a more bluesy sound as a result of adding the open G natural as well as the C natural. It's quite interesting to reflect upon the change of feel and nuance that's brought about by modifying a line to improve the ease of delivery.

In **Example 7** you have a bit of mix and match homework; a simple phrase progressing from G to C to A to D, and then a variation over the same chords. For the first couple of bars I've introduced a slide; pick the note where indicated with an 'S' and a line, and slide to the next written note. I've also incorporated logical hammer-ons and pull-offs as a starting point. Now you can experiment by adding your own ways of using the various embellishments to suit what you hear and how it feels most natural for you. In this way you will start to develop and emphasise your own unique style. No two guitarists will approach these phrases in an identical manner. ■

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'FORBEARANCE'

Carl talks us through a dissonant, compositionally 'restless' piece

'Forbearance' is part of my small but growing collection of solo guitar pieces. I recorded it on classical guitar but it works equally well on steel strings. I was going through a difficult time in my career at the time I wrote and recorded this: struggling to find enough work, and indeed a reason to keep persevering as a pro musician. I'm sure all musicians have felt like this at times.

However, as I have done on countless occasions, I used my sadness and frustration as fuel and wrote this tune. The title, 'Forbearance', means having patience and self-control in a difficult situation. It turned out so well that producer Tim Van Der Kuil (Adele's hat-wearing guitarist) decided it'd be an excellent way to start the album.

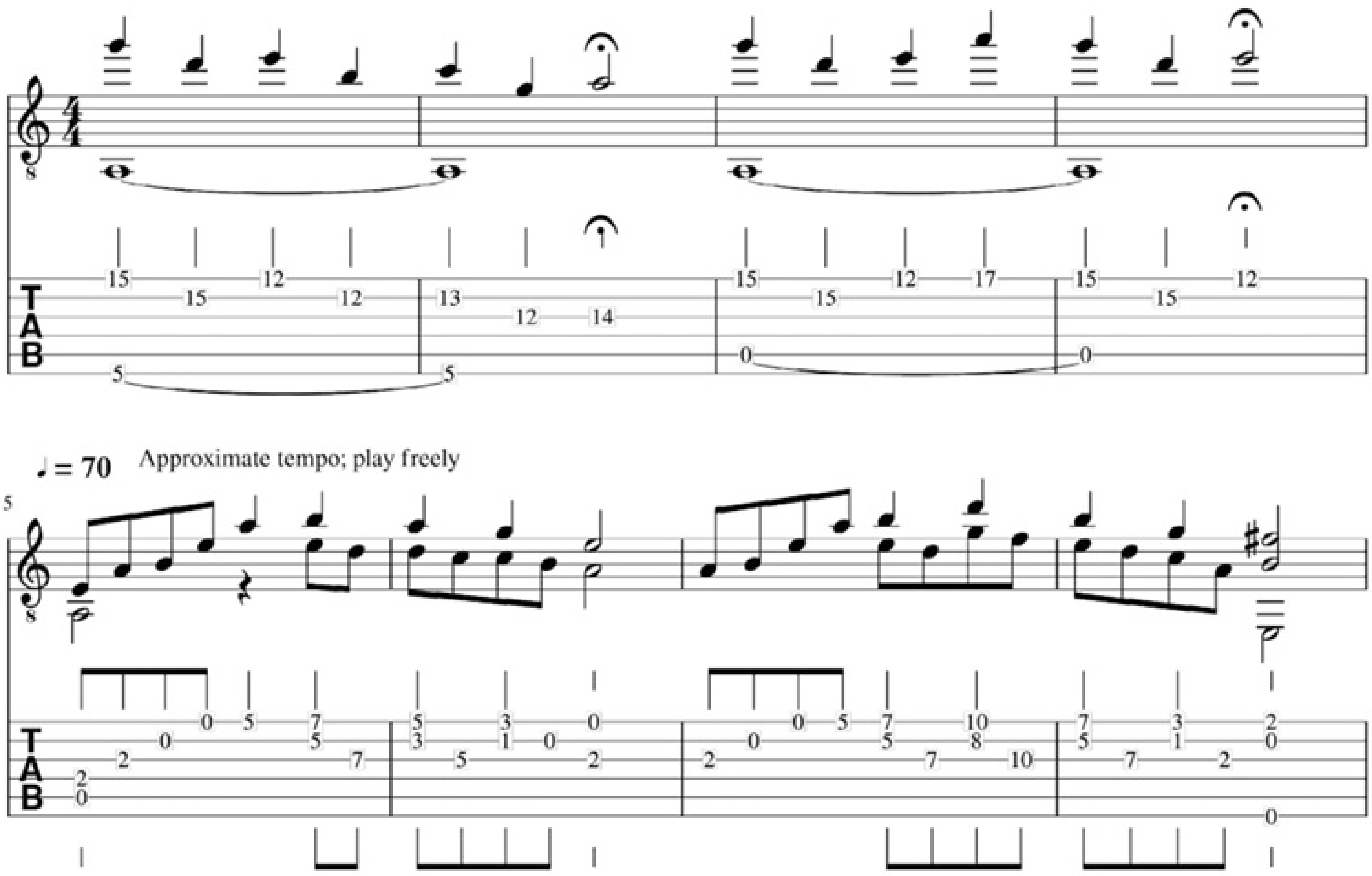
The mood is quiet and meditative, yet due to it never settling on a particular key centre, has a feeling of unrest. It starts out in A minor; the intro is actually played on glockenspiel over a loop of my classical guitar playing a low A pedal tone. The A minor tonality continues as far as bar 8, which clearly feels like E minor. Then in bar 9 it's abruptly back to A minor again. Bars 11 and 12 are in G major, while bars 13 to 15 are in B minor. Bar 16 is back in A minor, followed by bars 17 to 20 in E minor. Bar 21 isn't in any key at all, and the tune resolves to G major in bar 22 where it remains until the end of the tune.

I didn't actually think about these key changes as I wrote it, just followed my ears. For me this is the best way to write. Don't worry about being clever or cool, just sit with your guitar/piano until you discover something you've never heard before, writing it down before it 'escapes'. Keep doing this until it's finished. If you don't have time that day, return to it every day until it is done. If you only have 10 minutes spare, that's OK. Sometimes you'll sit there for an hour and write nothing: that's OK too. When finished, write it out neatly or notate it with software, and record a simple but decent demo of it.

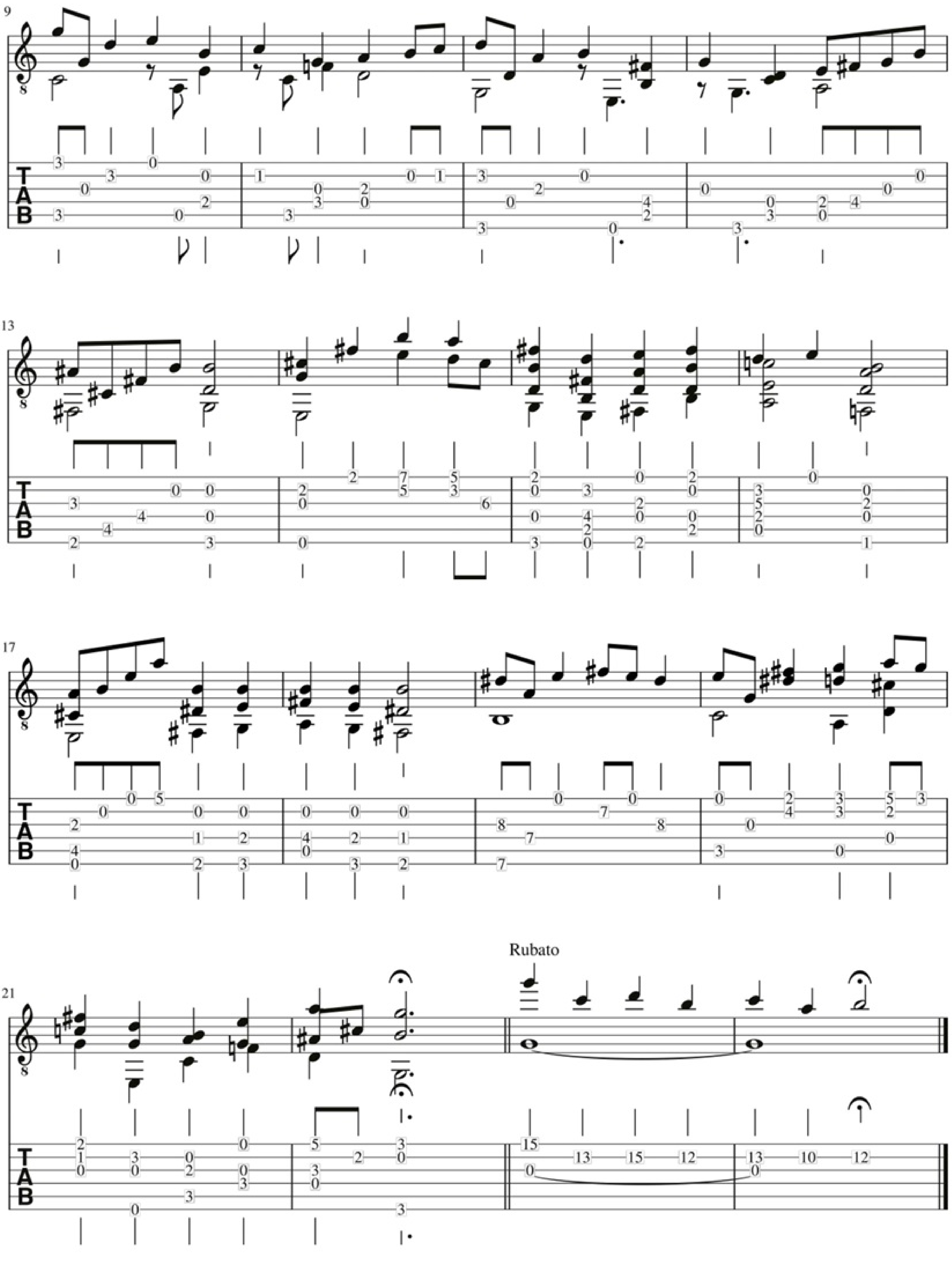
There are a few moments of mild dissonance here; the first chord in bar 14 is a rather stark voicing of E min6; bar 18 is an arpeggiated B7 with the open E string clashing against the D#; and bars 20 and 21 are a succession of mildly dissonant chords. I've never been a big fan of excessive dissonance. However, without a little, music can be bland. Dissonance is the musical equivalent of garlic. While few would eat raw garlic, most of us like a little taste of it to make our food a bit more interesting. ■

'Forbearance' is taken from Carl Orr's latest album. Info: www.carlorr.com

'FORBEARANCE'



'FORBEARANCE' (CONTINUED)



RICHARD GILEWITZ FINGERSTYLE GUITARIST

'GOSPEL SHIP'

Timing is something that can wait to be learnt later in your studies, right? Wrong, says musician and educator Richard Gilewitz

This issue's contribution on the traditional, spiritual tune 'Gospel Ship' was arranged by David Walbert, my teacher who regularly comes up with some of my favorite instrumental interpretations. I would like to take a keen focus on one of the most common elements in written music that regularly befuddles students: a study of what I like to call "the broken 16th notes".

I will make a go to simplify what can, on first appearance, easily give the impression of a much deeper complexity involving timing, especially when you take a first gander at "them thar funny lookin' notes"! Sometimes it can look like an ant jumped in an inkwell and ran across the page.

The first step to diffuse this musical model is to convey to you that once you understand the rhythm of just a couple of measures, you should have it for the whole piece. This should allow you to see early on that the task you face is not so daunting, and also show you the value of understanding written musical notation, even if you don't read the musical notes. Once you understand note values, at a minimum you will no longer be guessing as to the timing of what it is you are trying to play. If you guess, then you will most likely guess incorrectly.

Often players play through mimicry, imitating what they heard someone else playing. This runs the risk of capturing what might be misinterpreted on their end. If you learn the note values, you will learn the music correctly. Keep in mind there are different rhythms and feels and tempos that play a role in the long run. A swing rhythm, a ritard, an accented note, crescendo, decrescendo, tempo and groove, can all fall into the mix down the road.

But for now, one bar at a time.

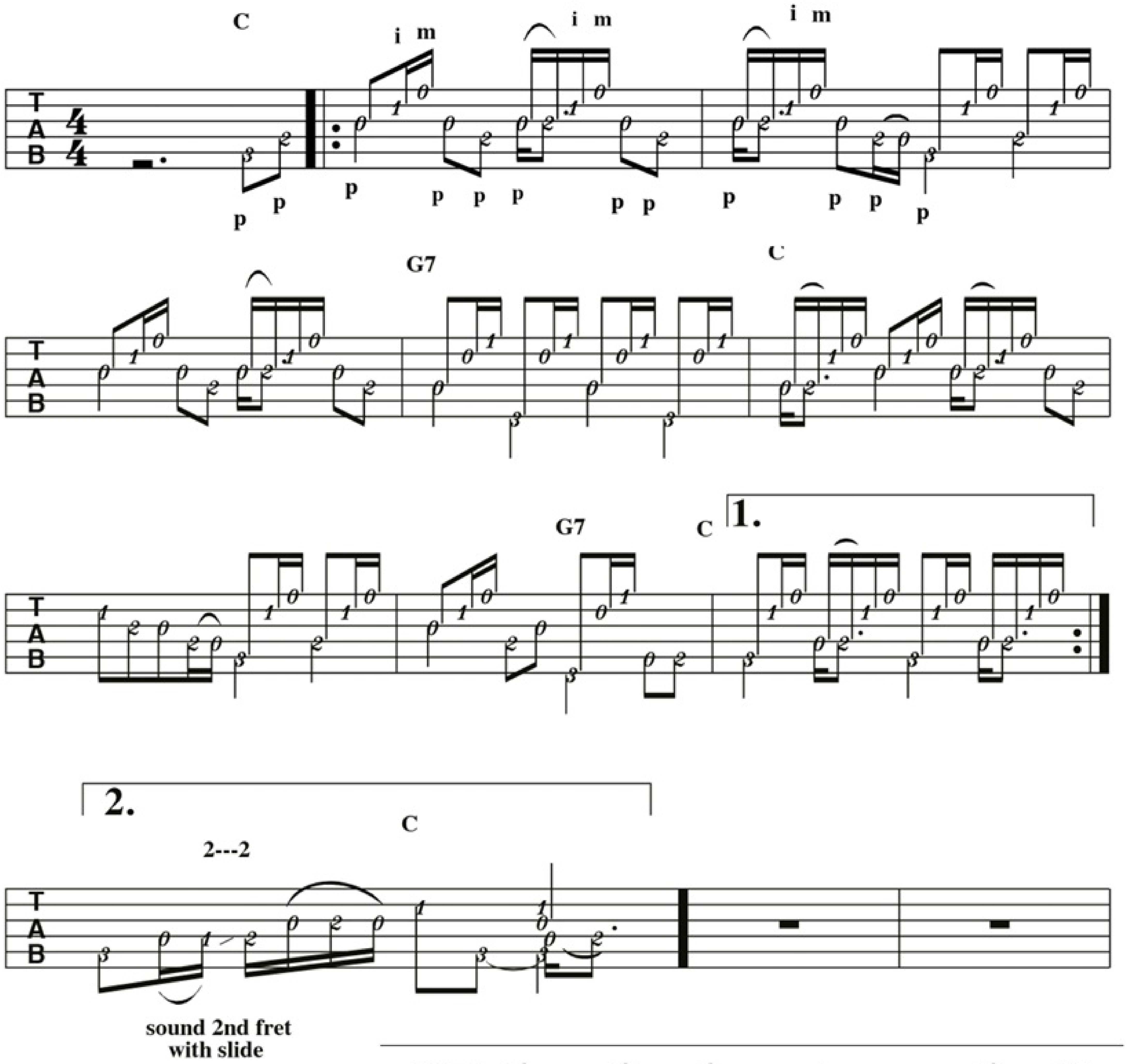
Bar one starts with a three-beat rest and two pickup notes leading into the tune on beat four of the bar. These would be counted 4 & (4 and). I always like to have a landing note, so I would practice these two notes plus the "landing" on beat one. Very simple at this point. Just count 4 & 1 and strike three notes, all plucking with your thumb. Set your metronome to about 68 and play the four beat and the one beat on a click. Allow for two clicks before repeating the effort. This is your first tiny little two-beat musical puzzle piece to cycle.

Now comes the first little trick, which involves the broken 16th notes. If you briefly look ahead to beat three in the first bar, you will see four notes connected together with a double line across the top. Notice an arch between the first two notes and below a split line bar between the first two notes. For now, ignore those two items. I'll come back to that. Observe the four notes connected on the top with the double bars. What you are seeing are four 16th notes connected together. I count these four notes as '3e&a', collectively the equivalent of a single quarter note. They are played rapidly, although this can depend on the tempo of the piece. To demonstrate the functionality of 16th notes: if you had a bar of music with two quarter notes followed by a group of four 16ths and then another quarter note, it would be counted as 1, 2, 3e&a, 4. Tap or clap that with a metronome setting on about 68 where you hear a click on each of the numbered notes 1, 2, 3 and 4. Obviously you've got to hustle up to get the 'e&a' in there.

Beat 1 of the first full bar is your first broken 16th grouping of notes. The first note you strike has a single line above it, which indicates one eighth note that is the equivalent of two 16th notes. This note is followed up by two notes with the double bar above them, indicating they are 16th notes. Therefore, that first beat is a grouping of an eighth note followed by two 16th notes. Instead of counting 1e&a, be sure to not strike on the 'e' portion of that little grouping. I like to write the 'e' in to the right of the one beat and in the small space before the second note. You would now count this out as 1e&a, but try to silence the 'e'. Instead of counting out loud 1e&a, you would count out 1(e)&a, acknowledging that slight hesitation before speaking (or clapping) the &a.

I realise that this explanation can appear to be very tedious and possibly hard to follow without a demonstration. But I believe it is important to offer it for a short study before you get a teacher to demonstrate this for you. Why am I spending so much time on this tiny little bit? Because it's actually not a tiny little bit. The broken 16th rhythms will appear in, oh, only a few thousand tunes! I have witnessed many students simply guessing or approximating what they think is

'GOSPEL SHIP'



play entire song with p, i and m

p plays the melody

> **"Estimating is not an option"**

going on. Without having heard the tune and studied the notes, their chances of guessing it right are pretty slim.

Notice in the following bar there are three more occurrences of this exact rhythm, an eighth note followed by two 16th notes. In the second beat of that full bar, the stems are going down. Don't worry about that. The rhythm is still the same. Seek out the many occasions this same rhythm appears and you have half the puzzle solved. Fortunately, this particular piece has no reversal cases where there are two 16th notes followed by an eighth. If there were, it'd be counted as 1e&(a) where the fourth timing slot of the 16th group is silenced and not played.

Back up for just a minute to cover the arch between the two notes of the third beat of the first full bar. This is a hammer-on where you play the first note open and then hammer the fretting hand finger down on the second note (underneath the right side of the arch). Avoid doing the hammer-on too quickly: this can cause a hiccup to the whole passage. Look up 'grace note' to understand the difference between the two. Grace notes are very fast and not to be confused with an eighth note hammer-on.

Regarding the split line between the first two notes on beat three underneath, I'll save that for another time. It's just the way the timing is properly written in the bass region. For now focus on the broken 16th element and the relaxed hammer-on. Some of this may have made for rather mind-numbing reading. However, this study is possibly one of the most important I can share. In the learning phase, estimating is not an option. Once you have learned music properly, feeling the music to push and pull beats is the essence of great musicianship. But for now, I suggest going this route. ■

SIMON MAYOR UK MANDOLIN MAESTRO

'RONDEAU'

Inspired by one of 2017's most noteworthy events in the mandolin calendar, Mayor presents a marvellous piece by Henry Purcell

A small church just off Covent Garden proved to be the setting for one of 2017's most noteworthy events in the mandolin calendar. The Italian master Carlo Aonzo (pictured) gave a memorable concert, aided and abetted by The London Mandolin Ensemble in fine form.

I suspect Carlo stopped worrying about his technique many years ago; he has few peers in this department! To hear him play is to immerse oneself in his compelling interpretations of, in this case, mostly Bach and Vivaldi.

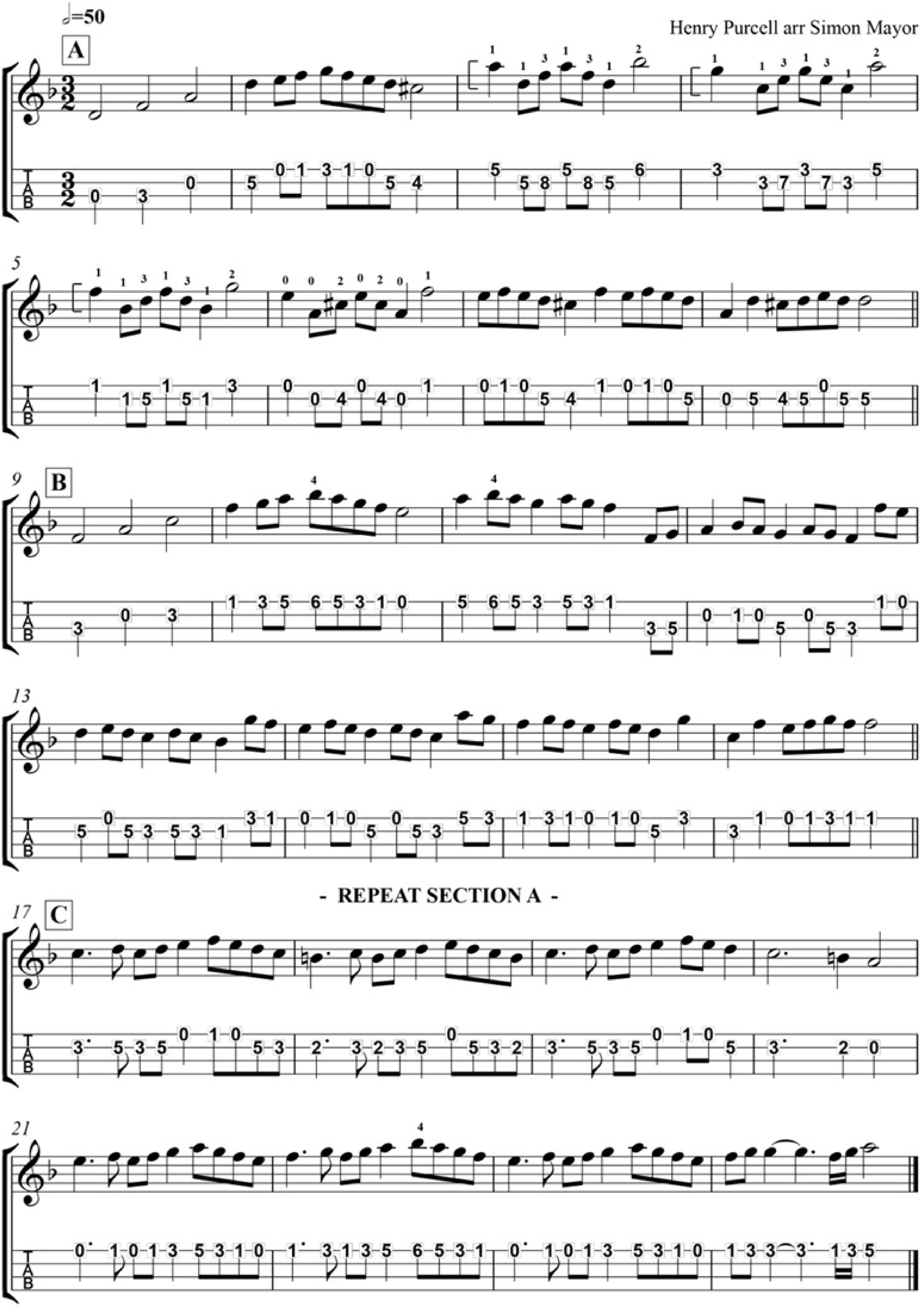
It's so rare to hear the classical mandolin played this well, and it prompted me to feature a classical piece in this column, although something a little less daunting than anything from Carlo's repertoire.

Henry Purcell's 'Rondeau' has been hugely popular since it was written in 1695, at the end of the composer's life. It is part of *The Abdelazer Suite*, incidental music for a play by Aphra Behn. The play itself is no longer popular, but the music lives on. The main theme was given a new lease of life in the 20th century when Benjamin Britten borrowed it for his *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, but here we'll stick to the original score. The form of a rondeau is A-B-A-C-A. In other words, the first section is always repeated after each subsequent section. Think of it as being like an A-section sandwich.

Despite the fact that this was not written for a mandolin, it falls under the fingers surprisingly easily. The fourth finger gets a good workout in the B and C sections where it is repeatedly required to play the Bb on the top string, but the main technical challenge is in the first section. Since you have to play this three times, you should get it sounding good by the end of the tune! So, in bar 3, move the first finger up to the fifth fret and cover the first two notes (the A and the D) with the pad rather than the tip of the finger. You're reminded to do this by the vertical bracket at the start of the bar enclosing the two notes on the stave. Play the rest of the bar as indicated by the fingering and the tablature. If you can, try to retain in muscle memory what you've just played, because something very similar happens in the fourth and fifth bars; check the music and you'll see what I mean. By the sixth bar, we're back down in that comfy old first position.

It was hard to believe this was the first time Carlo Aonzo had ever played in the UK, but the rumour is that he'll soon be back for a longer tour. Any mandolinists should really try to catch him. ■

'RONDEAU'



MIKE DAWES FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

FINGERSTYLE 101

Wanna play fingerstyle like a pro? Mike Dawes offers up a comprehensive, FAQ-style guide to mastering the technique

Greetings everyone! For this month's column I'll be taking a slightly different approach. Instead of an in-depth look at a specific piece or extract, I'll be answering many of your FAQs in the form of an introductory guide to this weird and wonderful acoustic microcosm. Below is a breakdown of my own top tips based on the past five years of hard touring and ten years of education based on instruction and pure trial and error. I hope this guide will save you some time on your journey and that you find some value in this advice. Let's begin...

1. THE GUITAR

I started my fingerstyle journey on electric guitar before buying my first acoustic steel string. I can't stress enough how important it is to get an acoustic guitar that feels right for you. Many store-bought guitars have setups suitable to flatpicking, with a higher action as a result. In some cases the string tension and action can be very off putting to fingerstyle beginners, resulting in not just a lower morale, but the development of poor technique and ear. I see this a lot. You should be looking for a low action with 'light' strings to allow for a more fluid introduction to two-handed tapping, large stretches and legato sequences. Steel strings, not nylon (unless that is the road you wish to pursue – see my friend Declan Zapala as an example!)

2. THE NAILS

As many of you will know, we fingerstyle weirdos usually walk around with one socially acceptable hand, and one picking hand talon. This is actually essential for many of the techniques employed by guitarists in this scene. Some players, Andy McKee and Petteri Sariola for example, will have a little bit of thumbnail but not so much on the fingers. This creates a warm picking attack but allows the thumb to stand out (the alternate angle of the thumb usually results in a lack of definition without any nail).

Players like myself, Antoine Dufour, Don Ross et al have extended nails on all fingers including the thumb. This creates a brighter attack and helps with various right hand techniques. I recommend you pick up Pierre Bensusan's 'Guitar Book' and Eric Roche's 'Acoustic Guitar Bible' to study the sections on nail care. A blend of nail and finger pad is advised. You can also find advice on nail coatings and acrylics. For what it's worth, mine are all natural, I guess I drink lots of milk or something.

3. THE PICKUPS

Acoustic guitars sound better than ever due to the advancement of pickup technology. It is still worth saying that the modern fingerstyle player may need more than a standard piezo to amplify certain effects. The most obvious of which is percussion. There are many systems available that combine a piezo or magnetic soundhole pickup with an internal mic, essential for those wide-reaching body hits. I'd also recommend trying out internal transducers that can stick to certain areas: they're affordable and pick up percussive attack well.

4. THE TUNINGS

Standard tuning is best most of the time, however those of you who want to experiment with extended techniques may benefit from working in an open tuning. Open tunings can expand the potential of self accompaniment in certain keys very easily and I'd highly recommend trying out DADGAD, open C, and open C#m9 tunings (some of my favourites).

5. THE REPERTOIRE

I hear the same old clichés being repeated over and over in the fingerstyle scene. Remember that the pre-YouTube world allowed for a sort of forced originality based on ear transcription. This is one reason why a lot of the original players in the community have such distinctive styles. Check out and learn pieces by Eric Roche, Don Ross, Michael Hedges and John Renbourn. The resources are all out there and this foundation is important. Once the repertoire starts flowing you can then begin to find your own voice through...

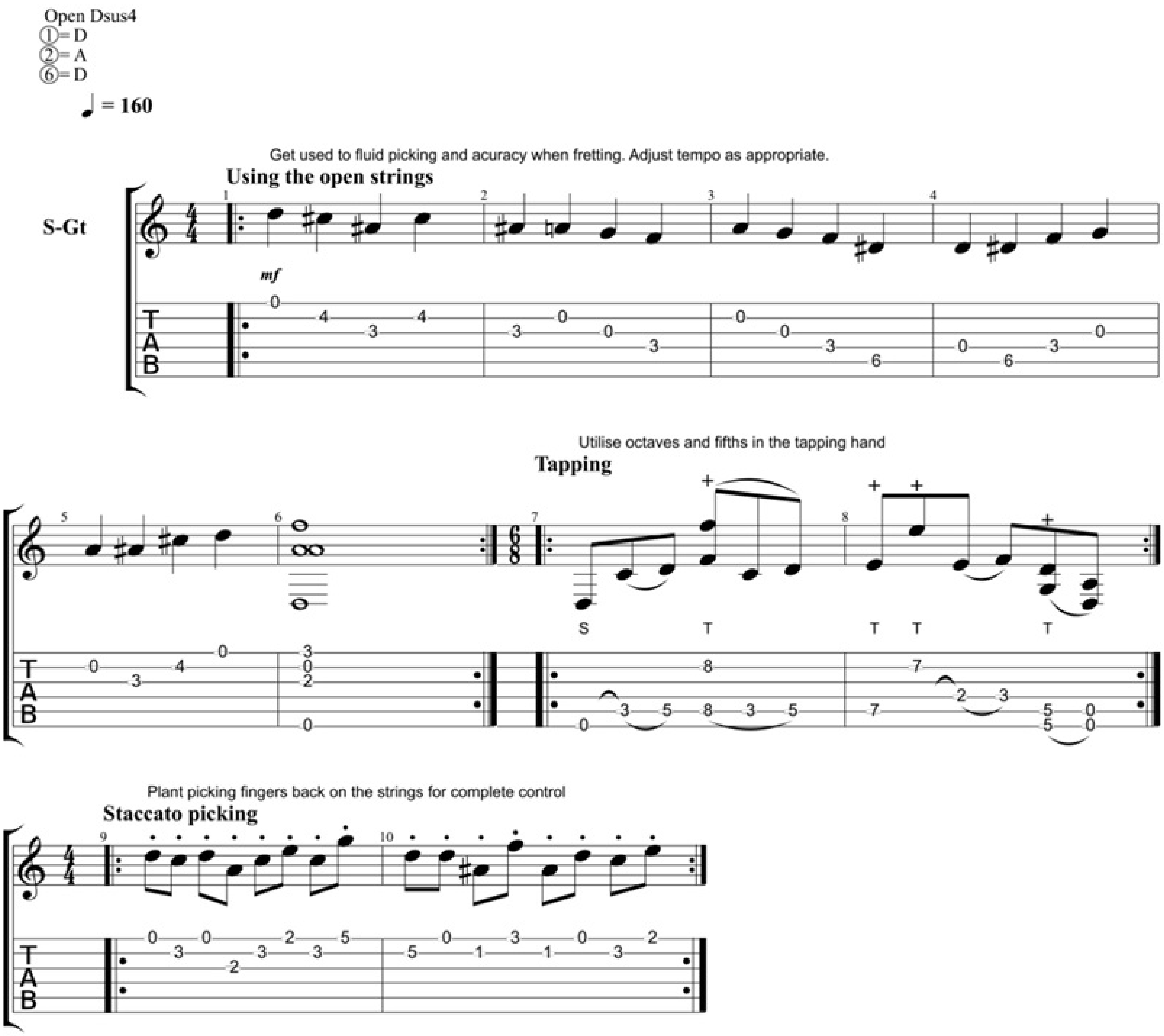
6. THE ARRANGEMENTS

Let's not kid around, one of the elements people associate with 'modern fingerstyle guitar' is the use of extended techniques, be it two-handed tapping, artificial harmonics or the use of the guitar's top and sides. In my experience, I've found that taking a song that you enjoy and arranging it note-for-note yourself on instrumental guitar is a very powerful and efficient learning tool, both in terms of learning a new tuning and implementing technique. The reason is simple. If you want to play (for example) a pop song's melody, harmony, bass and percussion, you will likely have to turn to these techniques to perform the predefined notes. It's beautifully limiting, much more than in composition where you have a greater freedom to say 'nope'.

7. THE EXERCISES

I know a lot of the modern techniques may seem scary, but it is the musical implementation listed above that is the hard part. Getting the techniques down can be a swift process if you are disciplined. Try the extracts I've included to introduce yourself to some of them. Like, seriously, it's not hard to

THE EXERCISES



> **"Composition is the number one method of finding your own voice"**

hit your guitar (facepalm emoji)... All of these extracts are in DADGAD tuning.

8. THE COMPOSITIONS

Now this list is obviously a bullet pointed guide, but when you feel comfortable with some open tunings and extended techniques you may feel confident enough to compose. I'd highly advise this as a tool to make music, but also as a way of applying tools you would have already achieved. Composition is the number one method of finding your own voice. It's a window into what makes you who you are. Even if your songs are seldom or even ever performed – get composing!

9. THE GADGETS

Capos, e-bows, tonewood amps, the list goes on. Don't be afraid to experiment with external tools. Check out Sergio Altamura and Stefano Barone, wonderful music produced using unusual textural devices. This goes for effects pedals too!

10. THE OPEN MIC NIGHTS

I cut my teeth on the Guildford open mic circuit and it was one of the most valuable experiences for my own development as a performer, composer and writer.

Get out there and meet other musicians and artists. I know this isn't directly related to our specific style, but the sense of community and influence I found in the scene impacted me greatly. Good luck, now get practicing! ■

RAYMOND BURLEY CLASSICAL GUITARIST

'CAPRICE NO.7'

Burley presents a lively piece by relatively unknown guitar composer Legnani

The name Legnani may not be as well-known as his contemporaries Sor, Carulli and Giuliani but much of his output warrants attention. Guitarist and composer Luigi Rinaldo Legnani was born in 1790 in Ravenna and died there in 1877. His career as a guitarist began in 1819 with a highly publicised concert in Milan. As a composer he is probably best known for his set of 36 caprices, Op.20, covering all the major and minor keys; these were possibly inspired by Paganini's 'Caprices Op.1' for solo violin. It is thought that Paganini and Legnani occasionally performed together. From 1850, Legnani retired from concert performing to concentrate on instrument making.

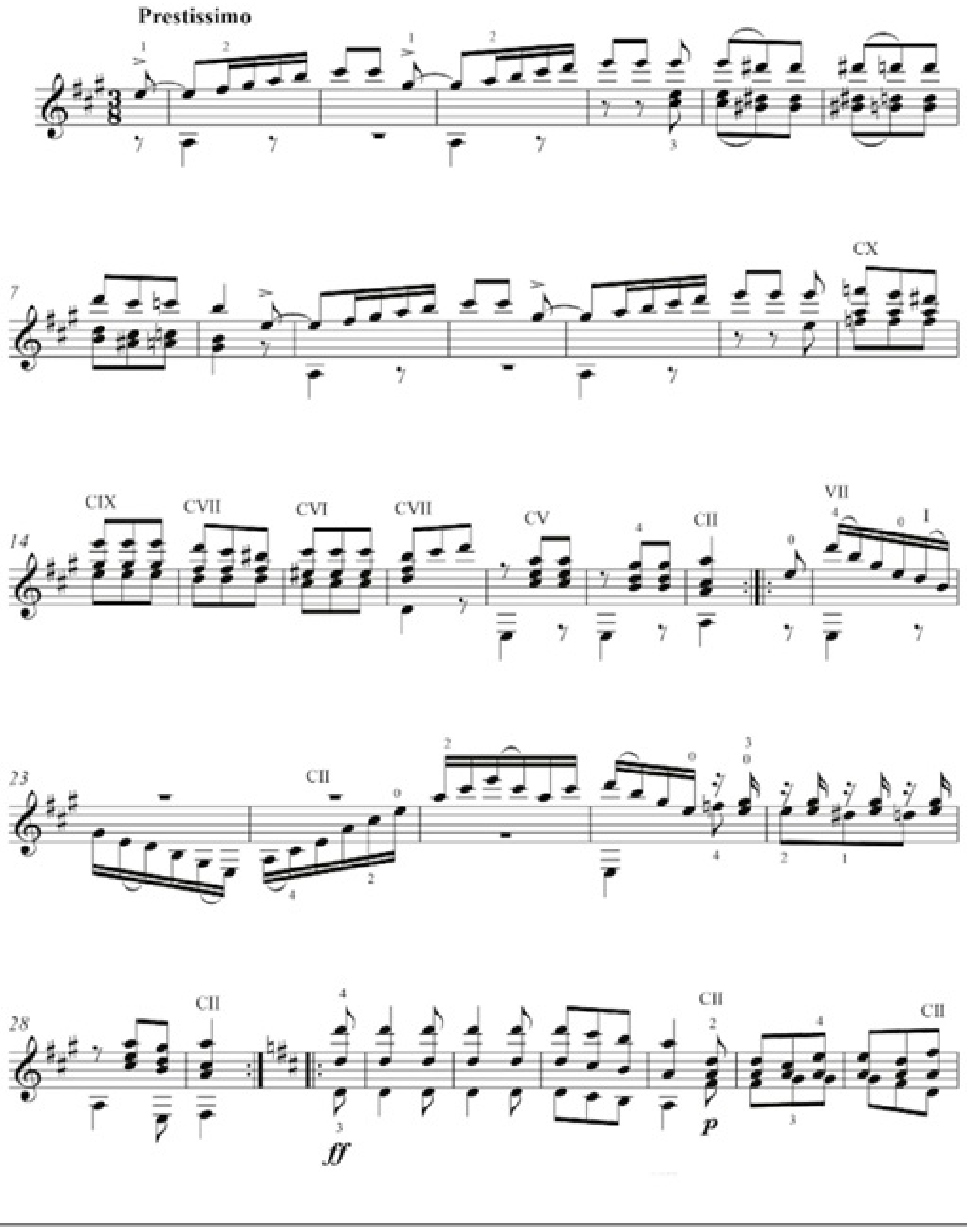
As well as covering all keys, the Caprices cover a wide variety of styles; No.7, in A major, is brisk. The Italian marking, prestissimo, at the head of the piece suggests it should be played very fast or as fast as possible. This, of course, will depend very much on individual technique so I won't suggest a tempo. It comprises four sections with repeats, a recapitulation and a temporary key change to D major. The piece begins with an accented anacrusis (or upbeat); after that the main problem may well be coordination between the hands at speed. In the first bar you may prefer to add a left hand slur between the F# and G# (and similar places throughout the piece) although Legnani didn't include one. The slurs indicated in bars 5 and 6 are performed by the left hand alone, sliding the first chord to the second. The following section, beginning on the third quaver, is made slightly easier by the occasional open string allowing the left hand to change position more freely. The problem with the D major section will probably be physical; the stretch between the fingers may take some work before it becomes reliable.

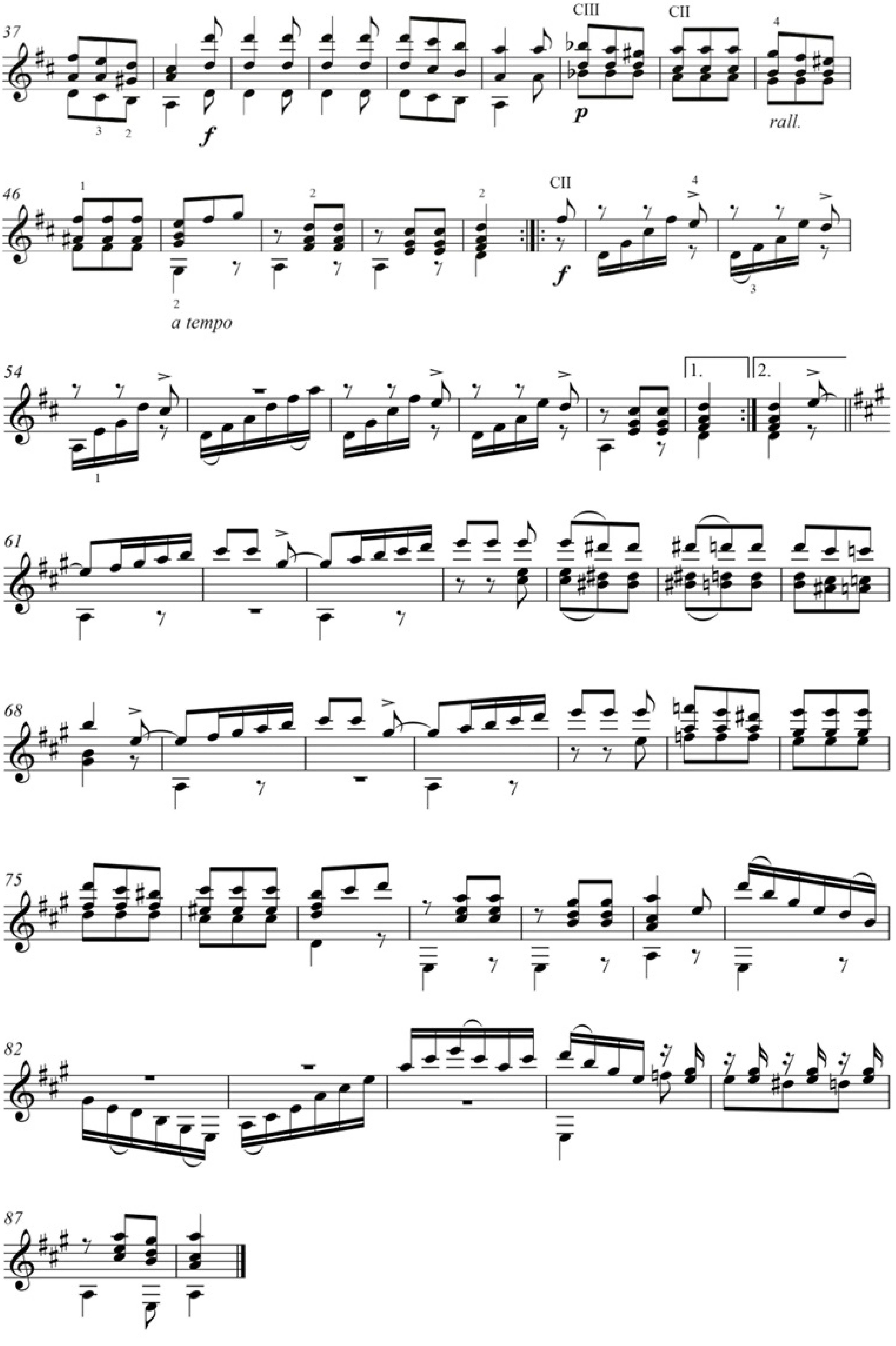
> **"Bear in mind that a caprice should never be predictable"**

As you may know, guitars in the 19th century were somewhat smaller than the modern concert instruments thus making this type of problem less pronounced. Notice the widely contrasting dynamic markings at this point. On the subject of dynamics: nothing is shown at the beginning of the piece. My suggestion would be to start at mf and crescendo through to the chords in bar 5. Try also a dynamic contrast when repeating a section. Bear in mind it is a caprice and should never be predictable.

As is often the case with a set of pieces such as this, some are immediately appealing while others may take longer to reveal their charm. The pieces are brief: several lasting less than a minute; the longest a little over three minutes. A batch of these pieces can make an excellent opening item to a concert. I have used them very successfully in this way.■

'CAPRICE NO.7'

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CII
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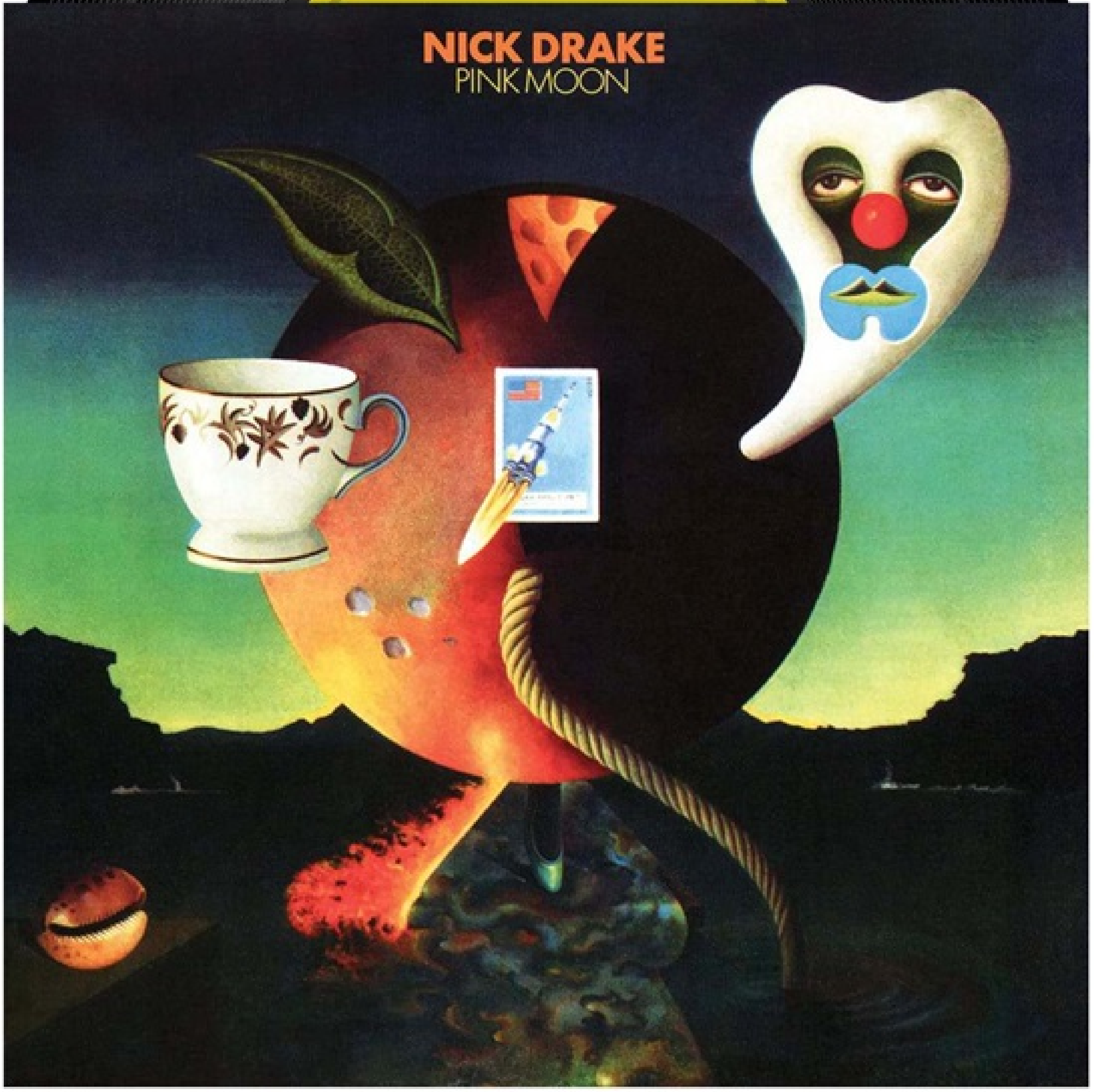
2.



Nick Drake's musical career did not go well when he was alive. But on this month in 1972, Drake released an album which would become a classic decades later

Nick Drake is an icon: an untainted and mysterious figure who never received any recognition in his lifetime. But Drake's life story is a bleak as some of his songs.

After landing a deal with Island Records, Drake released two albums *Five Leaves Left* (1969) and *Bryter Later* (1971). Both albums sold poorly and even Drake was unhappy with them. Professing them to be too elaborate and full, Drake declared to producer Joe Boyd that his next album would be just him and an acoustic guitar.

As both previous albums sold less than 5,000 copies, however, combined with Drake's reluctance to perform live or engage in album promotion, Island was not confident of another album from him. Additionally, Drake had isolated himself in his London apartment and was suffering from depression. In 1971 he saw a psychiatrist and was prescribed antidepressants, but was reluctant to take them due to the stigma associated with depression and fears of how the medication would react with the vast amounts of marijuana he was smoking.

In hindsight, many people have assumed that the melancholy music of *Pink Moon* was created in the throes of Drake's depressive state. But Cally Calloman of Bryter Music, managers of the musician's estate, disagrees. "Nick was incapable of writing and recording while he was suffering from periods of depression," she said. "He was not depressed during the writing or recording of *Pink Moon* and was immensely proud of the album."

In October 1971, Drake contacted John Wood, recording engineer on Drake's previous releases, about making a much starker recording. Wood agreed and the two set to work later in the month. Because London's Sound Techniques studio was booked during the day, the pair met for overnight sessions, starting at 11pm. In just two such sessions, Wood and Drake recorded the entirety of *Pink Moon*. As Drake intended the whole album was him and a guitar, aside from one piano overdub Drake added on the title track.

Contrary to popular legend that Drake dropped the album off in a plastic bag at Island Records' reception and then left without anyone realising, Drake delivered the master tape of *Pink Moon* to Chris Blackwell at Island.

Keith Morris, the photographer who took Drake's photo for the cover of *Bryter Layter*, was commissioned to photograph Drake for the cover of *Pink Moon*. However, the photos were not used as Drake's rapidly deteriorating appearance, hunched figure and blank expression were not considered good selling points. Instead, Island picked a piece of surrealist Dali-esque art by Michael Trevithick, who was incidentally a friend of Drake's sister Gabrielle.

Pink Moon was released on February 25, 1972, to mixed reviews. Some writers expressed confusion at the record's stark sound, others celebrated its simple approach and naked emotion. Regardless, *Pink Moon* flopped – selling fewer copies than his first records.

Drake fell into a deeper depression after making *Pink Moon*. He withdrew from friends and eventually moved back north to live with his parents. He died on November 25, 1974, aged 26, from an apparent suicidal overdose of antidepressants. He was 26.

Through the decades, reissues and an influential 1999 VW commercial that featured the title song, *Pink Moon* has become a classic – routinely featuring on publications' lists of the finest albums ever recorded. *Melody Maker* ranked it 48 in their All Time Top 100 Albums. In 2012, the album was ranked number 321 on *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. ■

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9570 - Tanglewood TW40 DAN Dreadnought
15490 - Tanglewood TW40OD Sundance Delta Orch.
15491 - Tanglewood TW40PD S/dance Delta Parlour
15489 - Tanglewood TW40 SDD Sundance Delta
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16570 - Yairi GW1100 Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
14426 - Yamaha F310 Dreadnought Tobacco Sunburst
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15576 - Yamaha LS26 A.R.E. II Handcrafted Guitar

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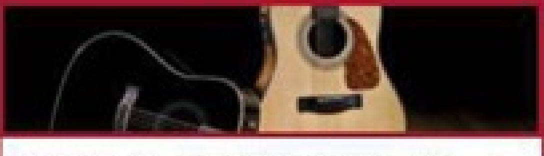
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
15257 - Rainsong SMH Smokey Hybrid
8234 - Sator YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
5255 - Sator YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
16554 - Simon & Patrick Woodland CW Mini Jumbo
0000 - Takamine -14 Models in Stock Now
14952 - Tanglewood TSF CE Black
14951 - Tanglewood TSF CE White
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
15787 - Tanglewood TVC X MP Electro Acoustic
15786 - Tanglewood TW28CE X OV
15583 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BK
15584 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BR
4187 - Tanglewood TW40 OANE Orchestra
12669 - Tanglewood TW45 EG E Super Folk Cutaway
15497 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Burgandy
15496 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, White
15982 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf Pro X45-AVE
15978 - Tanglewood X70 Electro Acoustic Guitar
16583 - Taylor 414CEN Nylon String Electro, Used
14419 - Vintage Pilgrim VPG900 Mayflower Deluxe
15850 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
8263 - Yamaha APX500 III Electro Acoustic, Nat
13726 - Yamaha APX500 III Acoustic Dusk Sun Red
16724 - Yamaha APX700 II 12-String Thinline, Nat
16723 - Yamaha APX700 II Thinline, Natural, LEFT
14439 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Blk
14436 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Nat
15575 - Yamaha FGX720SC, Black
14421 - Yamaha FJX720SC Electro, Sunburst
15817 - Yamaha FSX720SC II Black
15815 - Yamaha FSX720SC II Natural
8142 - Yamaha FSX730SC, Brown Sunburst
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
15617 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel String In Trans Black

Mandolin Family

8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
15437 - Ashbury Celtic Octave Mandola
15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
15435 - Blue Moon Irish Bouzouki, Pear Shape
14741 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 53S
15532 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin Pack
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
15598 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon Bouzouki, Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst

12 Strings



16506 - Fender CD-140SCE 12-String, Natural
16529 - Fender CD60SCE 12-String, Natural
16713 - Lakewood M32 Custom 12-String, Used
10991 - Tanglewood TRD12 Lefty 12 Acoustic, Nat

Classical Guitars

8590 - Azahar Model 31A Classical Guitar
13864 - Breedlove Pursuit Nylon Electo Acoustic
15547 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
16564 - Gibson Chet Atkins Solid Body Nylon Used
7366 - Jose Ferrer 1/2 Classical Guitar
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical, Used
12622 - Jose Ferrer 4/4 Full-Size Classical
16036 - Mendieta Artizan W Classical Guitar
16034 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
16033 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
6776 - Mendieta Conservatoire B Classical
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
16045 - Mendieta Conservatoire D Classical
6775 - Mendieta Conservatoire ECE Elec Classic
16058 - Mendieta Estudiante Classica Classical
16057 - Mendieta Estudiante Classic 3/4 Pequeno
16037 - Mendieta Estudiante Flamenco Guitar
6779 - Mendieta Estudio P Classical Guitar
16051 - Mendieta Estudio P Pequeno 3/4 Size
6778 - Mendieta Estudio R Classical Guitar
6774 - Mendieta J Flamenco Guitar
16038 - Mendieta Professional Classica
8586 - Mendieta Professional Flamenco Guitar
15769 - Ortega Coral NY Nylon String Guitar
15719 - Ortega HoneySuite CE Nylon String Guitar
6913 - Raimundo 630E Electro Classical Guitar
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Aniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
6442 - Roberto C1 Classical Guitar, Secondhand
16326 - Stagg C405 Linden 1/4 Classical Guitar
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15292 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar Red
15858 - Stagg C432 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
8353 - Stagg C530 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
16583 - Taylor 414CEN Nylon String Electro, Used
0000 - Westcoast - 5 Models In Stock Now
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
16269 - Yamaha CG170SA, Secondhand
14698 - Yamaha CS40 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele
15618 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Black
15621 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Tobacco Brown
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Nylon, Nat
15620 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar TBS
15969 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Nylon, TBL

Acoustic Amplification

5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
9494 - AER Compact 60 Mk III
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig.Compact 60
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
16480 - Fender Acoustic 100 Acoustic Amp Combo
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
15775 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4", Ex-Demo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
5574 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
14941 - Tanglewood TBA5 5 Watt Acoustic Amp
16030 - Tanglewood TBA5 5W Acoustic Amp, Used
16469 - Vox VX50AG Acoustic Amp
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
16714 - Baton Rouge UR11C Concert Ukulele
16390 - Baton Rouge UR11S Soprano Ukulele
16198 - Baton Rouge UR3B Baritone Ukulele
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
14648 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor Ukulele
16226 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE ElectroT LEFTY
15557 - Baton Rouge V4C Concert Ukulele
15790 - Deering Goodtime Tenor Banjo Uke, Used
10386 - Fender Mino'Aka Koa CE Concert Uke
13616 - Fender Piha'ea Soprano Ukulele
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
15833 - Korala UKS32 Soprano Ukulele
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
15670 - Luna Malu Peace Soprano Ukulele
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural
15691 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Black
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13681 - Nukulele "Helles Bier" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Slainte Bottle Ukulele
7102 - Ohana CK10 Concert Ukulele in Mahogany
13638 - Ohana CK22 Concert Ukulele
16104 - Ohana CK35G-5 5-String Concert Ukulele
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
16016 - Ohana CK70BA Concert Ukulele
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
15956 - Ohana SK16 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20 Soprano Ukulele Uke
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
15959 - Ohana SK35GS Solid Mahogany Gloss
9052 - Ohana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany
9529 - Ohana SK50MG Soprano Ukulele
4714 - Ohana SK50WG Soprano Ukulele
4465 - Ohana TK20 Tenor Ukulele
9049 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Uke
16063 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Ukulele
12184 - Ohana TK50MG Tenor Ukulele
9526 - Ohana TK50WG Tenor Ukulele
16103 - Ohana TK72 Tenor Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
16021 - Ohana CK80 Solid Cedar Top Concert Uke
16020 - Ohana Ukuleles TK70-6 6-string Tenor
16019 - Ohana Ukuleles TK70-8 8-string Tenor
12740 - ResoVille WeeHi Wachee Resonator Ukulele
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
16199 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, Black
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
10426 - Uluru III Tenor Ukulele
16454 - Uluru Koa I All Solid Koa Soprano Uke
10424 - Uluru Lehua I Soprano Ukulele
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele
15618 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Black
15621 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Tobacco Brown

Travel & Tenor Guitars

8846 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
15434 - Ashbury Tenor Guitar, Flamed Oak
13550 - Eko Mini Evo EQ Travel Guitar In Natural
16727 - Fender PMTE Travel Guitar, All Mahogany
16287 - JN Cigar Box Cask Hogshead Guitar
16286 - JN Cigar Box Puncheon Cask Guitar
14473 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
15432 - Luna Safari Tattoo
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 Signature Edition
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
14264 - Takamine GX11ME NS
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
14439 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Blk
14436 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Nat
16722 - Yamaha JR1 Acoustic Guitar, Natural
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
4615 - Dobro, circa 1975, Original Vintage
12737 - ResoVille Arlington MS12PG Single Cone
12730 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Nickel
12732 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Gold
13244 - ResoVille Edgewood WS12R Maple Parlor
12738 - ResoVille Lincolnwood WS12 Reso, Maple
12735 - ResoVille Parkville MS12 Single Cone

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

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